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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[HOPE'S FACE FLUSHED AS DOLLY RATTLED ON, KNEELING BEFORE HER AND THE BABY.]

## HER MISTAKE.

### CHAPTER XIX.

WINTER came on apace. The trees about Blairton were quite empty now, and nothing but the ivy and evergreens remained.

Hope had been in the country nearly six months, and as day succeeded day the good that Dr. Gunter had prophesied was fulfilled in her. She was not happy in the full sense of the word. Such a thing would have been impossible, remembering the severe mental battle through which she had so recently passed, but she had recovered herself almost miraculously.

The sunshine of her nature burst forth from beneath the clouds that had gathered so ominously upon it. There were moments when she was actually happy in a peaceful, restful way. The daily delight of her child's companionship, the proud pleasure in his quick development and sturdy growth, were sweet consolation to the heart that had been

emptied in vain before her husband's selfish indifference.

Hope's life took root in her child. She could not find gratitude deep enough within her to thank Heaven for this treasure vouchsafed to her. The dreams, the tender illusions, the soft clouds of happy anticipation she had once given to her husband were now all woven about her little son.

And without losing altogether that clinging interest and sad yearning that such a woman as Hope must ever feel for the man who had been her first love, she knew that gradually, imperceptibly, a change had come over her heart—that she could now face the future separated and apart from Hugh without flinching.

That pride and womanly dignity had come to her aid, and put to flight the weakness and longing that had so oppressed her, and taught her that life had been given her for better purposes than wasting the best treasures of her heart upon a man who cared nothing about her, and heeded the grave responsibilities and duties of a man so little as to remain during six long months without a word

or a sign of remembrance to his wife and child.

It was this neglect of his boy that taught Hope most swiftly and bitterly what manner of man he was that she had chosen for husband.

They had parted coldly—sorrowfully on her side, sullenly on his. But Hope had imagined when she first came to Blairton that of a surety she would receive some news of him from time to time.

Lady Anne wrote to her—strangely kind and sad letters for Lady Anne Christie to have written—but from his mother Hope learnt nothing of her husband's doings, for Lady Anne knew nothing.

She had sent him one sweet, gentle letter, written in the peace and loneliness of Blairton on her arrival there, making no mention of the cruelty he had done her, touching on no sore subject, but telling him that he must send to her did he need her at any time, that he was very, very dear to her, and she was his attached and faithful wife.

To this letter there came no answer, and

Hope had grown accustomed to the silence as the months passed.

"Perhaps he will remember baby's birthday," she said to herself once in late November. But the birthday came and passed, and Hugh, spending a small fortune in ready-money (found somehow, somewhere by his mother) on a corbeille of flowers for a fascinating Parisian danseuse, forgot that so tiresome an encumbrance as a child or wife existed.

He had managed to spend a very good autumn, and was settled in Paris until after Christmas, then he meant to retrieve his fortunes at Monte Carlo.

He did not think much of Hope, for, somehow, the remembrance made him uncomfortable, and Hugh never willingly allowed himself to be made uncomfortable. The question of providing for her was taken off his hands by Lady Hampshire, and therefore he need not trouble himself on that score.

It was certainly a pleasant thing occasionally to recall Hope's devotion to him. It soothed his vanity if anything happened to ruffle that major part of his conformation, but beyond that it was not possible to him to grasp or comprehend the nature of the treasure he had so indifferently plucked out of his life and trodden under foot.

"You are acting very wrongly, Hugh," his mother had said to him in the last interview she had with him. "You have married one of the sweetest girls it has been my lot to know. Hope loves you as few men are loved; but she is only human, and some day your cruelty to her will work its way, and then," Lady Anne's lips trembled only for a moment, "it will be on your conscience whatever befalls her."

"How like a woman, preaching like an oracle! Good Heaven, what will happen!" Hugh had answered in reply. "You don't know Hope. I do. She's a mass of sentiment and duty, and were I to desert her for fifty years she would still love me better than her life. She can't help herself. Pity she can't. Those sort of infatuations are out of place nowadays!"

So he had dismissed the subject, and so he still judged her when he thought of her at all. Now and then he was a little amazed at her silence; but he never doubted that the day would come when he should receive a letter from the girl, entreating him to return to her, or to send her some word, some sign of love.

Of Brenda Grant, or Brenda Woodstock, he thought with nothing but bitterness and as much hatred as was possible to his cold, selfish nature.

His momentary fancy for her was gone. It had been nurtured, as Brenda had guessed shrewdly, more for the sake of her money than herself; and when she had coolly turned her back on him at the crisis, and as coolly refused to come to his rescue as he always imagined she would do, Hugh could have almost killed her for having led him on, and encouraged him to make a fool of himself in more ways than one.

He set his teeth, and swore under his breath. The day would come when he would be even with this woman, he said; and then, having arrived so far, his anger melted, as every other emotion did with him, in a selfish regard for his immediate comfort and pleasure, and a languid indifference to all else beside.

He saw Brenda constantly in Paris. The Marquis had been too ill to be moved, and her visit to Meckington, and proposed sojourn at Blairton, were postponed for a time.

Hugh had been piqued at first, then amused when he found that the new-made Marchioness evinced so little desire for his acquaintance as to pass him unnoticed in the street.

He immediately gathered that Brenda intended to invade and capture the very highest society, and that she intended to forget her foolish flirtation with him as quickly as possible.

"Her next move will be friendship with Hope," Captain Christie said, with a sneer, as he passed Brenda in her luxurious carriage.

"I think you will not succeed very far in that direction, my lady."

It had been a relief passing words to Hope this postponement of Brenda's arrival at the Risk.

She had begun to make some plans for her own departure as soon as Lady Woodstock should make her appearance on the scene.

She knew not exactly what she would have done, for her grandmother was ailing very much, and she did not care to leave her alone under such circumstances. The news, therefore, of Brenda's enforced absence was welcome, indeed, to Hope.

Miss Hyde did not disguise her pleasure either.

"What mother wants with them here I don't know," she said to Hope. "I expect," she had added, "the title is the great thing. Mother loves a title."

Dolly was silent for a moment after this frank acknowledgment of her mother's failing.

"Isn't there a difference, fairy, between mother and Uncle Thomas?" she asked, after that pause.

"Their natures are not similar," Hope answered gently; "but one rarely finds such a man as the dear old Squire!"

"I love him!" Dolly cried. "He is so good, so gentle, so sweet." Then the girl had sighed. "I wish mother would think more kindly of people," she said wistfully. "I am sure it is a great mistake to doubt everybody. I—I told her so the other day, when 'Dolly found the buttons of her glove required attention,' when she was talking, as she will talk, about Mr. Leicester. It—it hurts me, fairy!" the girl said, lifting her big blue eyes to Hope's lovely face; "for anyone can see Mr. Leicester is a gentleman, and as honourable as he can be. I am sure he is very, very fond of Uncle Thomas, and never even remembers that he is so rich. Yet mother—"

Dolly stopped, there was a red spot on either cheek. "We quarrelled about him last night."

"About Mr. Leicester!" Hope said quickly. There was a shade on her face, brought there by the words Dolly had spoken.

"I think you are wrong, darling," she said gently. "Remember, you cannot change your mother's nature, and she is your mother. I am sure Mr. Leicester would be grieved if he thought you had made your mother uncomfortable or unhappy on account of him."

"I can't help myself," Dolly flushed. "I hate injustice, and I hate listening to unkind things about people I like. Don't you?"

"It is not pleasant, dear," Hope answered softly. Then, to change the subject, which was one that distressed her in a manner she could scarcely analyse even to herself, the bell was rung, and baby Douglas was brought in.

Dolly flew to him and covered his round, laughing face with kisses.

"I adore him! I could eat him, Hope! How sweet he looks in that frock! I do believe he has grown an inch since yesterday!"

"My treasure!" Hope whispered tenderly, as she took him in her arms, and folded him to her heart.

"It is a most extraordinary thing how much Mr. Leicester loves that baby—not extraordinary, remembering how beautiful Douglas is; but when one remembers that Mr. Leicester is a man, and men don't care for babies much, do they, fairy?"

Hope was kissing her treasure's soft curls and wee hands. There was a tiny flush on her cream-white cheeks as Dolly rattled on, kneeling down, to indulge more freely in baby worship.

Miss Hyde was devoted to little Douglas. She looked very pretty with her soft, flaxen hair knotted in a picturesque fashion at the back of her head. Hope was never tired of admiring the girl; she was the quintessence of happy youth. It was close on Christmas, and the weather was bitterly cold.

"Our blanket store is nearly empty," Dolly said, as she rose to go. "Mr. Leicester says there is great sickness in the town. Our soup

kitchen is tremendously popular. Aren't you glad, fairy?"

"Poor things!" Hope said, holding her baby a little closer in her arm. "Fancy, to be without food or clothing! Oh! Dolly, dear, I fear we are very ungrateful and wicked sometimes."

"You wicked! Uncle Thomas declares you are an angel and not a woman, and I am sure Mr. Leicester thinks so too!"

Hope coloured a little.

"Must you go, dear? This is only a flying visit, but we shall have a long day together tomorrow, and I must not be greedy."

"And what about the Quinoy's ball? Have you made up your mind what you will wear?"

"I shall not go," Hope said, nestling her head close to little Douglas's throat. "I am too old for dances."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dolly in dismay. "Not go? Oh! I am dreadfully disappointed! Why not, Hope, darling?"

"For a variety of reasons too many to enumerate all at once. I am sorry you are disappointed, little one."

"Oh? Perhaps you will change your mind. Women have got one prerogative. Do—do promise to think it over, fairy. I must fly now, for I have promised to be home to lunch, and afterwards I am to drive with mother."

Dolly made a wry face. "I hate driving with mother," she said, in her candid fashion.

Hope stood at the window and waved her hand to the pretty little figure sitting behind the pair of matchless ponies.

It had come upon her slowly but surely that there was trouble growing for Philip Leicester.

"She is a child in some ways, but not in all," she thought to herself, musing on Dolly, with the shadow returned to her face. "This is no idle fancy, I fear, and yet I am convinced he has not even a thought that such a thing could be. He is too much engrossed in his own life-story, whatever it may be. Dolly is to him a child, a pretty amusing child. I am grieved for her, grieved for him. There must come disappointment and trouble. If Mr. Hyde were like the dear Squire things might be different, and, even then," Hope ruffled her baby's hair unconsciously, "I fear it would still mean sorrow to Dolly. She does not understand. How should she, poor little thing, that Philip Leicester's heart is not his own; that though he lives here, and works so nobly, his spirit is gone from him, that the love she craves is not his to give. I sometimes wish," Hope mused on to herself as she relinquished her baby to his nurse and sat down before the fire, "I sometimes wish he would open his heart to me; it would give me such pleasure to help him. He is so gentle, so tender, to me. What exquisite tact he has! I know, I feel, that there is no man living who appreciates my troubles more than he does, yet he never lets me see this. He never by word or deed even ventures to offer me his sympathy. His pity would not hurt me," Hope said, rising and moving to and fro in a restless sort of way; "but there is something about Philip Leicester that is lacking in other people. I could not go to this dance." There was a red flush on her delicate cheeks. "I should feel that every glance that rested on me was full of pity, and it would kill me. I want no pity. I want nothing but to live here, as I am doing, peaceful and almost content. Gunnie was wise, as he always is. Had I sat down and lived only in my miserable thoughts I should have been worse to-day than I was six months ago. I have, then, much to be thankful for, despite all; and while I have such friends and my baby, I have the fullest happiness that I could ever feel or expect now."

## CHAPTER XX.

"You look beautiful!" the Countess said, with loving sincerity. "The living remembrance of your mother, child!"

Hope bent and kissed the sweet, worn face. "I feel quite strange in this dress," she said, laughing a little nervously.



"The excitement will do you good," Lady Hampshire said, gazing with tender delight at the picture of delicate grace and loveliness before her. "I feel inclined to be pleased at Mr. Hyde's illness since it takes you out, Hope."

Hope smiled, and drew on her gloves slowly. If her grandmother rejoiced at the sudden chance that took her out of her quiet, regular life, then Hope would not spoil that pleasure by letting the old lady know how little she desired to go to this ball and chaperone Miss Hyde in her mother's absence.

"I have left Master Dicky in my room, poring over a book of travels, *Mansgrove*," she said to her maid, as she was wrapped in a fur-lined cloak. "I think you had better see that he goes to bed in good time."

The large luxurious baroness drew up punctually at the door of the Rick, and Dolly jumped in.

"Darling, you look lovely! I can't see you, but I know you do. Oh! it is so heavenly going with you. Mother would have snubbed me all the way there and back again."

It was useless for Hope to reprove Miss Hyde for her outspoken criticism on her mother. Dolly and her mother did not agree, and nothing could not make them do so, not even Hope's earnest endeavours.

The drive was a long one. "Into the next county," Dolly declared, but she chatted so incessantly that the time passed miraculously, and they had arrived before they were well aware of it.

"Madam Quincy sent Mr. Leicester an invitation, and he said he might come," Dolly whispered, as they removed their wraps. "I think I caught sight of Uncle Thomas's white head."

Hope's appearance was in its way a small event; and Madam Quincy, a handsome scion of an old French family, welcomed her warmly.

"I only wanted this," she said, as she greeted the slender, girl-like woman, so exquisite, so dainty, so beautiful in her white satin and priceless lace. "Now my ball will be a success!"

Hope smiled, and answered in her pretty way. She had met Madame Quincy several times in London during that eventful season, and had liked her very much.

The girls of the house trooped about her and kissed her, and somehow Hope found that the ordeal she had dreaded so much had turned into a pleasure.

She refused to dance, but sat and chatted with one or two she knew; while Dolly was besieged by half-a-dozen partners, and carried off triumphantly by a good-looking young fellow, the son of a baronet as impoverished as the proverbial church mouse.

"I am afraid I am not a good chaperone," Hope thought to herself with a smile, as she saw that Dolly and Mr. Fairley had progressed at once into a flirtation.

She was taken for a stroll into the conservatories by her host, and her spirits rose unconsciously at the sound of the music. There was a pleasure, and yet a sadness underlying the pleasure, in making acquaintance again with the glitter of diamonds, the frou-frou of silken skirts, the scent of exotics.

Memory revived with these surroundings, but she determined to overcome memory if possible. She was smiling as she walked down a long corridor full of palms and soft lights, and came towards Philip, who was leaning against one of the doorways in the ballroom, supremely handsome in his evening dress.

"We are butterflies to-night, you and I," Hope said, laughing a little as she shook hands with him, and her host had relinquished her to Philip's care.

"It is my first ball," Philip answered, gravely. "I feel quite nervous. I am out of my element."

"Take pity on me and come and talk to me. I have a message for you from my Douglas."

"From Douglas?" Philip's picturesque

face flushed, as it was wont to do whenever Hope spoke her baby's name.

"I passed a lovely little corner just now. We will go there," she said.

They walked down the corridor together, her little hand resting like a snowflake on his arm. He had never seen her in so coquely a garb before, and the picture of her young loveliness framed in the simple yet exquisite white satin gown made the blood circle about his heart in a wild, throbbing fashion. He dared not let his eyes rest on her. She tempted him beyond his strength; she loosened, as it were, the chains he had been binding about his love, and let it break forth to torture, and yet to fill him with exquisite delight.

"Here is our corner. Look how cosy it is, Mr. Leicester!"

It was a nook draped with curtains, and was cosy, as Hope had said. They could sit and see the dancers pass to and fro in the distance, and the music came to their ears in a pleasant, subdued fashion.

"And so Douglas has sent me a message," said Philip, as she leaned back in the corner with a little sigh, and he sat on the low chair beside her.

"Perhaps you can guess it?" Hope said, with a glimpse of her rare smile.

Philip shook his head.

"I have not the least idea."

"I am afraid you will not try to guess," Hope said, in playful, reproving fashion, "so I must enlighten you. Douglas, then, Mr. Leicester, sends you his love—would like to know why you have not been to see him for so long! He is quite hurt with you."

Philip's handsome face flushed. He turned his dark blue eyes from Hope's scrutiny.

"I owe Master Douglas many apologies," he said, as lightly as he could. "I own I have neglected him lately, but I have been very busy, and—"

"Say no more. You are forgiven, Douglas accepts the apology," Hope said, laughingly; then she became serious. "Tell me about that explosion. Was it very bad?"

"It might have been awful, the men are so careless; they seem to play with their own safety. I do all I can, but cannot persuade them to adopt all the necessary precautions. I have always an awful dread that a great calamity will come one of these days."

"But they believe in you—like you? Can you not make them more careful?" Hope shivered. "There is so much depending on the men. Surely, when they know it is a question of life or death they will be persuaded, Mr. Leicester?"

"They laugh at me. They have no fear. Born and bred, as it were, in the coal mine, they do not feel or think as we do." Philip looked at Hope quickly. "But you are shivering. Are you cold here, Mrs. Christie? Let us move."

"I am very comfortable, and I like this corner. If you will very kindly ask one of the maids to give you my lace scarf, I shall be quite cosy."

Philip rose at once and disappeared, but turned back just as he was going, and undraped the curtain that framed the corner into an alcove.

"You will not feel the draught so much," he said, as he let it drop, and hid her from his sight.

Hope smiled, and then, as she was alone, she rested her head against the cushions, and closed her eyes.

The ephemeral pleasure she had experienced was fleeting fast, and memory, with a persistence that was absolutely painful, forced itself upon her.

She found herself dwelling on the past, and suffering anew all the many agonies that had come to her in the months gone by. Hugh's utter indifference to her, his silence, his acquiescence in a complete and utter separation, seemed to strike her all at once in a new and more cruel light.

Perhaps it was the contrast afforded to him by the man who had just left her—a contrast

that came unconsciously, and yet most painfully, that aroused this sudden feeling. Perhaps it was the sight of the young, light-hearted happiness about her—a happiness that made her own blighted life seem more desolate.

Hope could not have told exactly what brought it, but the feeling came and drove the smile from her lips, and the colour from her face.

She was, after all, little more than a girl, and yet at the very threshold of life her joy and happiness was torn from her.

She had lulled herself into a sort of forgetfulness through the past months, but to-night the sort of mental coma was broken, and she realised her position in all its humiliating and bitter points.

She shivered a little in her solitude. In a sort of incomprehensible way she yearned for something to comfort her, somebody to lead her out of this labyrinth of painful thought. She had never felt so keenly her isolated condition before. She was vexed with herself for letting her trouble come upon her anew, particularly at such a moment.

"When he returns we will go back to the ball-room again," she said to herself.

Suddenly two voices sounded close behind that dropped curtain that veiled her from sight, and she heard two people seat themselves immediately against it, preventing all egress.

"The heiress is enjoying herself. A pretty girl!" said one of the voices—a man's.

"Can't compare with Christie's wife," was the answer from a second man.

"Oh! no; but she is something out of the common!"

Hope coloured crimson, and felt very uncomfortable. She was too shy to move and make her presence known, and yet it was not pleasant to her to be so attended.

"Where is that blackguard?" the first speaker asked.

"Christie! Oh! playing the usual game. Hanging on to little Désirée at Monte Carlo. The girl is infatuated about him, and would give him every diamond she possessed. Can't understand how it is Christie gets on so well with women. He is the most absolutely selfish man I ever knew, and that is saying a good deal."

"Désirée can't have much to give him."

"What she has he will have, that you can be very sure of. The man is a born spend-thrift. He ran through his wife's bit of money pretty sharp. He only married her for that, of course."

"Poor little thing! I pity her from my heart. She has made a bad bargain. They are quite separated, I hear?"

"Oh! Christie will return to her to-morrow if she happens to come into anything when old Lady Hampshire dies."

"I am hanged if she should take him back had I anything to say in the matter."

"Women are strange creatures," the other said, reflectively. "No doubt this sweet little thing lavishes a love on Christie that a man his superior in every sense would never get."

"Well, of course, that may be so; but, hang it all, you know in such a case as this it is putting a woman to a very severe test—practically deserted by her husband, and left to live out her young life as best she can, while he goes philandering all over the face of the globe. Women are strange creatures, as you say, but if I were a woman I think it would take a great deal to make me forgive such conduct as Christie's. Why, he is making himself the talk of the Riviera. One cannot *affiche* oneself to such a well-known little individual as Désirée without paying the cost of the folly; and, to say the least of it, the position is distinctly humiliating for this poor little wife. There ought to be some *exemplum*," the speaker finished, warmly, "whereby a woman could free herself from the bonds of such a marriage as this. Divorce has an ugly sound, use it which way you will, but it is a deuced shame that a lovely young woman like

that should be condemned to such an existence. It is a life wasted!"

"Do you remember the Winslows? There was a similar case. She was one of the sweetest of women."

Hope, crouching back in her corner, heard the two men rise. They did not walk away at once, but evidently stood in the corridor. She could hear them chatting away on a dozen different subjects. She felt strangely hot, yet her hands when they clasped themselves together were quite cold. She was trembling from head to foot.

In a vague, almost mechanical way she had imagined that her affairs must have afforded much food for gossip. But she had lived out of the world so entirely these last six months she had almost learned to forget that suffering which every proud woman must endure at the bare thought of publicity and comment on the most delicate and sacred matters of her life.

This brief conversation she had overheard came upon her like a thunderclap, and roused her out of the sad yet peaceful, dreamy condition in which she had lived and moved and had her being for so long.

The pity expressed for her stung her to the quick. The position was, indeed, distinctly humiliating. As these men had said so calmly and easily, her husband's shame was reflected on her and on her child.

Her heart, burning with an anger that had never entered it before, gave a sudden throb. The full misery and horror of her position seemed to come upon her all at once. She did not until this moment realise how brave she had been, what an almost superhuman fight she had fought with herself, and with all her difficulties. It seemed as though suddenly some chain had snapped that had girded her about, and fitted her for this fray.

The news of Hugh's further infidelity and dishonour, communicated in such a way, seemed to throw her all at once from the meadow land of peace and rest to the furthest depths of the dark abyss, which shame and cruel disappointment had stretched ready for her young feet.

In this moment Hope saw not one ray of light, not one touch of comfort. Not even the remembrance of the gentle lady at Blairton, nor her brave, bonny boy, could soothe her.

Every nerve in her body was quivering. Every hope, every sense of pleasure, of peace, was gone—gone she imagined for ever, never to return.

She looked up with a start as Philip drew back the curtain, and appeared with the shawl on his arm.

"I am afraid you will have imagined I have been making this shawl," he said, lightly, then his brows met suddenly in a frown.

The sight of her white, drawn face gave him a sudden, sharp pain. He had left her a lovely girl, with a smile on her lips that almost banished the sadness in her eyes now.

She looked haggard, almost old, with an expression of such suffering in those marvellous eyes that was beyond description.

He stood for a moment undecided. Hope began to collect herself. She suddenly remembered where she was, and who was with her.

"You are very kind, Mr. Leicester," she said, her lips moving stiffly and with difficulty. "I am ashamed to have given you so much trouble. I—I am quite hot now, and I have sat here so long. They—Dolly will—"

She half rose, but her limbs refused their office, and she fell back again on her seat.

"Please don't move," Philip said, hurriedly. "Miss Hyde does not want you; she is quite happy and very busy. You are not well, Mrs. Christie. You could not do better than remain where you are. No one will disturb you here, and if you will allow me I will get you some salts, and then mount guard outside so that your hiding-place is not discovered."

He scarcely knew how it was he spoke so easily, so quietly, as though the sight of a suffering woman, and particularly this one, was nothing to him, and yet the bitterness of this

moment was almost more than he could bear. His whole being yearned over her, as she sat crouched up as unlike the radiant beauty of a few moments before as it was possible to imagine. He had not the key to this change, but he knew without words that it arose in some way through Hugh Christie, and the hot anger that came suddenly to him almost overpowered him.

He turned and was about to move away, but Hope stopped him.

"Please don't go, Mr. Leicester. I do not want to be alone. I think I am very stupid; but you—you seem to understand me, and—you do me good." She took the shawl from him and wrapped it about her. "I think after all I am a little cold," she said, with a wan smile. "Please sit down again. What were we talking about when you went away?"

"I think we had got as far as little Douglas," Philip said, obeying her in every way, and trying to be as natural and easy as possible. There was a flush on his face, and his ears rang again with her words, "You seem to understand me, and you do me good!" How little she knew the joy those few simple words had given him!

Hope had drawn off one of her gloves, and passed her cold hand over her eyes.

"About Douglas!" she repeated, her lips trembling. "About my baby!" A little moan escaped her as the recollection of Hugh's degrading conduct returned to her. "Almost I wish," she said, in a choked, hard sort of way, "that my baby was not here!" Then she gave a little cry, "Oh! what am I saying? My baby, my Douglas, my only happiness!"

She put her hands over her face and burst into a fit of weeping. Philip paused only a moment; then, white as death, he rose and left her. The curtain was dropped again, and her grief was cut off from all observation.

He drew a seat near and sat down close in front of the curtain. From within he could hear her broken sobs, and each tear she shed seemed to draw a drop of blood from his heart. Philip Leicester had faced some terrible moments in his former rough, wild life; but of all moments of peril, moments of pain and anguish, none had been equal to this in point of suffering.

"I would give my life to spare her one second's sorrow," he said to himself in a dumb sort of way, "and yet I can do nothing—I must do nothing. I must sit by and see her suffer as she suffers now, and carry my love untold to the bitter end. Oh! my heart, my life, my love, if you could only know! There might be some comfort to you in the knowledge, though happiness be denied to you for ever."

How long he sat there he did not know. It must have been an hour or more. Several people looked at him curiously, and once now and again his young hostess tried to tempt him to dance. Dorothea Hyde pouted as she walked past him.

"I thought you were fond of dancing?" she said.

"I am too old for dancing, and my knee hurts me," Philip replied, with a smile. He had injured his knee slightly in the beginning of the week.

"You are most unsociable!" Dolly said, with another pout. "Have you seen Hope? She has vanished from mortal eyes."

"Mrs. Christie was here a little while ago. Are you anxious to leave, Miss Hyde?"

"Oh! no, no, no," Dolly cried, and she hurried her partner on.

Philip sat looking after her. For the first time in his life he envied her her youth and light-heartedness, not for himself, but for that other who was so very little Miss Hyde's senior, yet for whom all light and joy seemed gone.

Hope's voice roused him.

He pushed aside the curtain, and found her very pale, with the tear marks showing on her face.

Hope put out both her hands.

"My friend," she said, brokenly, "my

best, my truest friend. I—I cannot thank you—but—"

Philip bent his head, and kissed both the little hands.

"Does such a small thing deserve thanks? Do you not know that to serve you in anyway is happiness to me?"

He spoke without thinking, unconsciously, involuntarily, and Hope's eyes resting on his face noted the red flush that came there, and the eager intensity.

She drew her hands away slowly, feeling suddenly an extraordinary sense of pleasure and comfort, definite yet indefinable. It was not the moment to analyse her feelings. Her head was aching, her throat and eyes burning from her sudden passion of grief. Yet all at once it was as though some fairy's fingers had lain themselves upon her troubled heart and brought her peace.

Without a word she put her hand on his arm and let him lead her away.

He took her into the conservatory, where the lights were dim and her pale cheeks would be unnoticed. Then he went to seek out Dolly, and manoeuvred so well, that almost before Hope knew it she was driving back to Blairton, with Dolly half-asleep beside her, and the memory of Philip Leicester's beautiful eyes and his warm hand-clasp to chase away the gloomy thoughts that might come.

"If I have sorrow I have also some joy," Hope said to herself, as she thought of him. "Heaven is good when it sends me such a friend!"

And that strange, indescribable sense of comfort that Philip's presence had brought lingered until Hope had lain her weary head on her pillow, and was lost in a deep, dreamless sleep.

(To be continued.)

## THE MILLIONAIRE'S DAUGHTER.

—O:—

### CHAPTER V.—(continued.)

"The Souths of Liverpool are numerous. There is one family that I hope sincerely you do not belong to," he said, tremulously.

"My father is Henry South, and he is a shipowner," replied Vesta, carelessly.

His face was turned from her, and she did not see the deathly whiteness that overspread it, or see the despair that crept into his blue eyes.

"His daughter above all others!" was the muttered words that rose to his white lips; but he crushed them back, crying out to himself that surely this was the cruelest stroke that fate had yet dealt him, for he loved this dark-eyed girl as he had never loved anything in his life before. He had loved her from the first moment his eyes fell upon her flowerlike face, and he asked himself in that moment how it was to end.

He was gay and careless—a beauty worshipper; but no one had ever attributed to handsome Ralph Stoddart a dishonourable action. He revered all women for the sake of his mother and fair sisters. No broken hearts had been laid at his door; he was no trifler. He was a young man of the strictest honour.

Our readers must bear this in mind when they read what follows.

"I will be happy while I may," he thought, shaking the fit of despondency from him by a violent effort.

It was so beautiful down in the deep green glade! The sunlight filtered through the thick, green foliage; the ground underneath their feet was a carpet of wild flowers—bluebells and white hyacinths, pale strawberry blossoms, and purple foxgloves. Overhead, where the thick branches met, the birds were



singing as though hope and love were dawning for them.

This was something like romance, sitting under the spreading shade of the green trees, listening to the singing of birds and brook with this handsome hero by her side, with his bonny blue eyes, full of unspoken love, riveted on her face.

"I almost feared you and Miss Saville had gone when twelve o'clock came and you were not here," he said, "for I heard over at the village that the present school term was to close a week earlier this season than usual."

"Yes, the girls all went home early this morning," replied Vesta, with a very troubled face, "all with the exception of myself. For some reason quite mystifying to me I am to be kept here a whole fortnight longer."

"To be cooped up in the school-room alone?" he asked, surprisedly.

"Oh, no. I shall not have to study; I can roam about the grounds where fancy wills," she answered. "But, for all that, it will be very lonely now that the girls are all gone."

"I shall be staying here a few days longer in the village," said Ralph, eagerly. "Do you suppose Mrs. Latham would permit me to call upon you?"

Vesta drew back with a merry laugh.

"You do not know her," she answered, laughing. "I would not dare mention your name to her—she has such a terrible aversion to men. Why, she would forbid me even to speak to you."

"You would not be pleased at that?" questioned Ralph.

"No," confessed Vesta, hot blushes dyeing her pretty, dimpled face.

"Nor shall I!" he exclaimed, energetically. "If she were to imprison you—keep you under lock and key because of it—I should be your Prince Charming. I would find some way to rescue you."

Suddenly they heard the great bell sounding from the far-off village.

"Two o'clock! I never dreamed I had stayed so long!" cried Vesta, starting to her feet in alarm. "Why, the time has fled so quickly that it has scarcely seemed ten minutes to me!"

"I am so glad to hear you say that!" he cried, delightedly. "Would you like to see me again?" he asked, abruptly; adding, wistfully, "Would you care for it?"

"Do you want to see me again?" stammered Vesta, in girlish confusion, raising her dark eyes for one half moment to those fatally winning blue ones, and then dropping them quickly and shyly.

"More than I can tell you," he answered, earnestly. "If you will only say that you would care for it I will manage in some way. Do you care?" he persisted.

"I shouldn't mind," she faltered, shyly. "Will you come here to-morrow at this time?" he pleaded. "Do come!"

"I cannot tell—perhaps. Good-bye."

"I will not say good-bye—that seems as though you never intended to see me again. I will say *au revoir*."

He saw the pretty dimpled face grow crimson as she met his glance, and he dared not look again, for the impulse was strong upon him to kneel there at her feet and tell her the passionate love that was in his heart; but that last parting glance had sufficed to trouble the calm, still depths of Vesta's young heart.

She walked quickly back to the seminary. Somehow the world seemed a little changed to her. Of course it was the same path she had traversed so short a time before, but now it seemed a little different—the light of the sun seemed more golden, the fragrance from the flowers more sweet; even the birds in the branches seemed to be singing a new song.

For an hour Ralph Stoddart stood motionless under the trees where he had parted from Vesta.

"I ought to go where I can never see her

sweet face again," he muttered, huskily; "and yet how can I, when I love her so?"

It had been only a week since he had first looked upon her face, but he loved her from that first moment with an intensity that surprised even himself. To youth love's sweet dream comes quickly; yet there was a reason—ay, and a grave one—why he should have gone on his way and not braved fate by loving this fair young girl.

At that very moment Mrs. Latham and one of her grim assistant-teachers were searching impatiently through the grounds for Vesta.

"Of course you know best," her companion was saying; "but Vesta South, in my opinion, is far too wilful to be permitted to roam where she pleases without restraint. You see she has gone beyond the grounds into the glen. I was relieved, I assure you, when I heard that the young man connected with the tennis affair had left the village."

Mrs. Latham, usually so grim and stern in all things, thought nothing of Vesta's wandering off into the flower-laden dell; and in not searching there for her she committed a great error, she told herself in after years.

"The birds and flowers cannot put nonsense into the girl's head," she told her companion, grimly.

Her peace of mind would have taken flight at once if she had but dreamed that among the fragrant roses lurked a young and handsome man!

## CHAPTER VI.

THE days that followed flew by on golden wings.

It so happened that no day passed on which Vesta did not see handsome Ralph Stoddart.

It was never by appointment—always by accident, as Vesta supposed—and she grew to look forward to seeing him with an eagerness that even she little dreamed of herself.

Oh, foolish, beautiful hours spent by the brookside or wandering through the glen! What a pity it is that love and youth cannot last for ever, and that romance should ever fade away after a brief existence, like the flowers that come and go.

He had frankly told Vesta just how it happened that he had come to the village with the tennis team—his father, a wealthy Leeds banker, had disinherited him because he would not marry a woman whom he had selected for him.

There had been a stormy interview between father and son, Ralph stoutly maintaining that he should certainly please himself when it came to taking a wife, and that he would go down to the grave in single wretchedness if he never came across a girl whom he could love, and that if he ever did find a girl whom he could care for he would go through fire and water to win her.

"You will go out into the world a beggar. Work for your living! That will bring you to your senses," the old banker had cried, stormily, little dreaming that his son would take kindly to this alternative; but in this he had reckoned without his host.

"You shall never have cause to say that to me again, father," Ralph had answered, spiritedly. "I am no white-handed idler. I can work for my bread, and I believe it will taste all the sweeter for being earned. I can at least get book-keeping to do in the autumn, but in the meantime, now that it is midsummer, I can go out with a tennis team. I can earn enough money from what has hitherto been but mere sport to me to carry me through, and leave me something over besides."

The banker never dreamed his son meant it, and he would not believe it until he actually ascertained that it was the truth.

Ralph had indeed gone with the tennis team, but he would not recall him.

"The craze will not last for ever with him," he said, grimly, to himself. "He will soon be back."

And another thing Stoddart had confessed

to Vesta. He had sprained his arm in saving her, and, although he did not wear it in a sling it was painful still, and for that reason his companions had been forced to leave him in the little village of Grassmere.

The day came at last when Vesta came to him, telling him, with paling cheeks, that she was to leave on the morrow.

She was startled at the change that came over his handsome face. All in an instant it was as pale and haggard as death.

"I cannot lose you so, Vesta!" he groaned—yes, it had come to that—he called her "Vesta" now.

"Why could you not come and visit at my home?" she said, blushing deeply. "I am sure both papa and mamma would be delighted to see you, and have the opportunity of thanking you for saving my life."

He clasped her hands and looked down into her face with something very like horror written upon his own.

"Vesta," he cried, "for the love of Heaven, if you value our friendship never mention my name to your father—never describe me to him!"

"Why not?" asked the girl, in puzzled wonder.

"I cannot tell you now," he cried, hoarsely. "Do not ask it; only promise me this: make a solemn vow to me here and now that you will not mention my name to him."

"I won't if you really wish me not to," she said, lightly.

"You promise solemnly?" he cried.

"Yes," she answered.

A great sigh of relief broke from his lips, and he seized her hands, covering them with passionate kisses.

"I must go," cried Vesta, rather startled at this, the first real demonstration of affection handsome Ralph Stoddart had ever shown towards her since that awful hour when he had clasped his strong arms so manfully around her, whispering to her that he would save her fair young life or perish with her.

"Won't you come, if only but a few moments, and say good-bye to me this evening, Vesta?" he pleaded. "I will be standing by the entrance gate when the moon rises. Come, if but for one moment. I must see you again."

She promised, and, Heaven help her, she lived to rue it all her life afterwards!

With bent head Ralph walked slowly away from the glen that had been such a heaven to him.

"Oh, if the past could but be undone," he groaned under his breath. "I would give my life to win beautiful little Vesta, but—the sentence never was finished."

A heavy hand fell on Ralph's shoulder, and a voice that made him recoil as though a serpent had suddenly stung him cried out in his ear.—

"Do you intend to walk right over me, my dear fellow? Where are your eyes, anyhow? And what are you in such a brown study about?"

Ralph wheeled sharply around.

"Eric, is this you?" he cried, hoarsely, eyeing the man who stood before him keenly—suspiciously.

"Is not my voice proof positive, or do you believe in making assurance doubly sure, my dear cousin?" he asked, throwing aside a shoulder cloak, slouch hat, and heavy black beard and wig as he spoke, and, standing there, cool and smiling in the summer sunshine, was a man fair, young, and handsome—the very counterpart of Ralph Stoddart himself. A twin brother could never have borne a more perfect likeness to him.

"Eric Stoddart!" breathed Ralph, hoarsely.

"Precisely," returned the other, adding, "And now that I have convinced you without a doubt as to my identity, I shall again don these deceptive auxiliaries to my comeliness and propose that we have a little quiet chat together."

"I have nothing to say to you," cried Ralph,

hastily. "Why are you here? How dared you come to me?"

"Softly, softly, my dear boy," returned the other. "I pray you do not indulge in ugly expletives. In reply to your first question I may answer, I dared a great deal for the purpose of seeing you, and the same answer will serve for question number two, by adding, I am, pretty well, run down for funds, and I thought perhaps you could help me in that line until I happened to overhear a couple of cheap discussions the affair you had with your father, and that he had disowned you."

"Why, it must have been the deuce of a racket you had with the governor, and all about a woman too. I must say, though, the governor was right in that instance, and a pretty fool you are to throw over an heiress with two millions of money. Lord! I wish I'd ever got such a chance. Why, I wouldn't care if she was sixty, and as ugly as the wife of the very devil himself—though, by the way, it isn't recorded whether his satanic majesty is married or single. Possibly he is a widower; they generally have less of the angel and more of the devil about them."

Ralph Stoddart was gazing at his companion with a glance of winking scorn.

"I decline to discuss my affairs with you," he said, haughtily. "Why are you here? I ask again."

"Now, Ralph, do not put on those high and mighty airs with me," returned the other in an injured tone. "Remember that I saved the life of both your father and yourself once upon a time, and you owe me at least civility for that. Say, and even the little sister whom you love so well would now be lying dead but that I risked my life to save hers."

"Forgive me, Eric, I do often forget that," murmured Ralph, hoarsely; "but have I not quite paid up that debt of gratitude in that Henry South affair—when you forged your employer's name and cashed the cheque, and when you were arrested and held for trial I came and stood by you; ay, we stood side by side, both denied the crime, and the clerk could not tell which one of us was innocent, which one guilty; then I branded myself, as it were, with a heinous crime, and all to save you, and they had to let you go free, and the cloud stands against us both to this day in the Liverpool courts, and now you are wanted for other crimes for which you had to fly; but rest assured if you are apprehended I shall never shirk you."

"I paid the debt of life, Heaven help me, with my honour. Come to me in an hour's time to my hotel," continued Ralph, abruptly. "I cannot talk to you now," and turning on his heel he walked rapidly away.

His companion looked after him with a little low diabolical laugh on his lips.

"Ah, if he but dreamed what brought me to the village of Grassmere, this Heaven-forsaken out-of-the-way place, that saint would upset my plans if it cost him his head. He shall never know that I have recently learned that Henry South has a daughter, an only child, who will inherit his million of money."

"Henry South prosecuted me and bounded me out of the country, and if he could but cast his eyes on me he'd have me behind prison bars for the rest of my life; but I will take a glorious revenge on him. I will strike his heart through his pretty daughter. His money shall fall into the hands of the man he abhors. Ha, ha, ha! And after I have won the girl whom I detest now for her father's sake, I will crush her heart—so."

And as he spoke he stepped out of his way to crush the hearts out of the modest daisies and tender violets, and stalked on, leaving them lifeless and bleeding in the path behind him.

"Mrs. Latham's school," he said, consulting his memorandum-book, "that must be somewhere near here. I will wait until dusk to step around there and reconnoitre the place, and lay out some kind of a plan for a romantic meeting with Vesta South. The heiress must be mine at any cost!"

## CHAPTER VII.

THE interview, which Ralph Stoddart had with his cousin Eric at the village hotel, was certainly a stormy one, and it ended by Ralph giving the handsome, so-called every shilling he had about him that he could possibly spare, even the costly diamond ring on his finger, the agreement being that reckless Eric, who so fatally resembled himself in all particulars, would leave the country without delay, starting from Grassmere at midnight.

"I shall not see you again," Ralph said, as he parted from his cousin at sunset. "I shall be too busy this evening to talk with you."

Eric held out his hand very gracefully, but the other drew back white and stern.

"It is not the hand of an honest man, and I refuse to take it," he said; and, turning away, he walked hastily down the path.

Ralph Stoddart, brave though he was, might have trembled had he chanced to turn back and see the expression on his cousin's face. It was the malignant expression of a fiend incarnate.

Eric looked after him with eyes that fairly glittered with intense rage.

"I will make you rue the day you ever made that remark, my fine, honourable cousin!" he hissed. "I will make you repent it, and ask pardon for it on your banded knees! Ah! if I but knew of a way to avenge that haughty heart of yours I would go through fire and water to accomplish it! My revenge will overtake you some day, and when it does—beware!"

Eric had promised to leave Grassmere by the midnight train, but even while agreeing to this he represented the smile that threatened to creep up to the lips the golden moquette concealed, and thought how far this was from his actual plans.

He meant to leave, that was true; but only for the purpose of taking up his abode for a week or so in another little village two miles distant—a place that Ralph had evinced a dislike for and which he never visited, therefore he would never dream of his short sojourn there.

The idea of finding his cousin and getting what money he could from him had been, by no means the incentive that brought him to the quiet village, as we have previously stated.

He had heard that Henry South, the great shipowner of Liverpool, had a young and exceedingly pretty daughter, and he had come to the village for the sole purpose of seeking her out and wooing and winning her if it was within his power.

Ah! what a glorious revenge it would be upon the man who was hounding him into the very jaws of prison, to marry his fair young daughter!

A thousand times he had laughed aloud at the very daring of the scheme since it had first entered his head. He had said over and over again to himself that no matter who and what the girl was, he would marry her if he could.

He learned that she was still at school, and he believed that he would have little difficulty in singling the heiress out from among her companions.

Eric walked quietly along the country road, little heeding where fate directed his steps, until at last he found himself directly abreast of Mrs. Latham's seminary grounds.

Quite involuntarily he paused, looking with some curiosity towards the pile of grey granite half hidden among the tall cedars. The sun had set long since, and slowly the dusk was coming up and deepening into the darker, greyer shadows of night.

Slowly one by one the stars came out and fixed themselves in the great arched vault above. The field flowers sunk down among the grasses, and the tired birds had gone to sleep with their heads beneath their wings.

A great full moon, like a white jewelled globe, hung high in the spangled heavens,

casting a bright light clear as noonday on the still, green earth, the flowers, and the trees.

No sound disturbed the stillness of the spot where Eric Stoddart found himself save the chirping of the crickets and the night wind stirring the leaves above his head, for his footfalls made no sound on the thick, velvety sod.

"Heavens!" he muttered, under his breath, "I think I would go mad from envy if I were to remain in this vicinity three days. I—"

He stopped short in his mutterings with an exclamation of surprise, for at that moment, standing in the arched gateway, he beheld in the clear bright moonlight a young girl.

The sight of that bright, laughing young girl, with her arms full of passion roses, standing just within the arched vine-wreathed gateway, would have startled anyone.

He stopped short amidst the dense shadows of the trees and looked at her.

Great Heaven! could it be possible that this was the daughter of Henry South, the little heiress whom it was claimed was worth at least a million of money?

Despite all the beauty of the lovely face there was much about it that resembled Mr. South so fatally. Surely this must be his daughter, and ah! how lovely she was! Neither artist with ideal brush, nor poet with glowing words, ever painted or sung of a more radiantly lovely maiden, he told himself.

A thrill of pleasure shot through his heart.

"Such a peerless little creature would be well worth winning for love's sake alone," he murmured.

But why allow such mad thoughts to run riot in his brain? That he who had always been of the world worldly, laughing with a sneer on his lips at love and lovers, should at last feel something very like a pang from Cupid's bow!

He stood gazing at the rare beauty of that exquisite face like one fascinated.

He had crept so near her, screened by the tall hedges, that he could have put out his white hand from among the shadows and touched her dress. He almost feared she must hear the tumultuous throbbing of the heart so near her own.

Suddenly, as he watched her, he heard a little sigh ripple over the red lips so like ripened cherries.

"Dear me!" murmured the girl. "Why is he late, I wonder, and ah! my last evening here?"

Eric Stoddart could scarcely repress the fierce glare that rose to his lips.

The girl had a lover, then, for whom she watched and waited. He feels an insane desire to crush this unknown rival—yes, strike dead at one blow the man who had awakened a pang of interest in this girl's heart. Still, he wondered idly what manner of man was he to have power to fascinate so peerless a creature.

He was not to be kept long in suspense.

There was the sound of hurried steps on the velvety sod, and a tall, dark form appeared outlined against the white, moonlight background.

"Oh—at last!" murmured the girl, flinging down her roses, and springing forward with a glad cry.

One instant more and the tall young man was bending over her, clasping her little outstretched hands, murmuring inarticulate words of happiness, and as he spoke he turned his face directly toward the man concealed among the trees.

One glance and Eric turned pale as death.

"It is—Ralph, by all that is wonderful!" he stammered, under his breath, and clenching his hands so tightly together that the nails pierced the tender flesh; but his rage was so intense he did not even feel the pain.

It must be understood that he had no scruples in regard to eavesdropping; and while a war as bitter as death raged in his heart as he watched the lovers, he did not permit the slightest sound to betray his presence.

Like a statue carved in stone he stood leaning against the trunk of a tree watching and



listening. "Not an expression, not a word escaped him.

Ralph had found his companion a seat on a fallen log and threw himself in his accustomed place, full length on the grass at her feet.

"Our last evening together, Vesta," he murmured. "Do you realize it?"

"The remembrance of it did not seem to cause you to hasten," replied the girl, with shy, downcast eyes. "I—I waited almost ten minutes at the gate for you."

"Did the time seem long to you?" he questioned, eagerly. "Tell me, did you really wish me with you sooner? You would answer me at once, darling, if you but knew how I long to hear you say that you did."

There was no answer from the cherry-ripe lips.

"I will tell you the truth," he whispered. "I must confess that I debated long and earnestly with myself as to whether I should come to the trysting-place or not."

The girl started, opened her great dark eyes very wide, and the baby roses fled from her cheeks. The man who was watching them so intently noted all this with bitter rage.

Vesta South drew her hand from her lover's clasp with the haughty pride of a little queen.

"I ought to thank you for being so complimentary," said Ralph. "I was about to add that I deliberated as to whether I should come or not, because I knew how hard it would be to part from you again. The very dread of looking forward to that moment has almost driven me mad; but still the hope of being by your side, even for a few moments, would be a magnet strong enough to draw me from the other end of the world. Ah, Vesta, you are dearer to me than life itself! Are you angry with me for daring to tell you so, dear?" he asked, wistfully.

"I—I ought to be, but somehow, I am not so very angry," murmured she, shyly, her lovely cheeks all aflame as she admitted that much.

"Vesta," he asked, recklessly, "the hour has come when I must know the truth. Do you love me well enough to marry me?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

"TELL me, Vesta," gravely insisted Mr. Stoddart, "do you care enough about me to marry me? On your yes or no depends all my future happiness."

"I do care for you, Ralph," she faltered, with all a young girl's pretty shyness; "but I do not want to marry anyone for ever so many years yet!"

"Years, my darling!" cried the impetuous young lover. "Surely you are not so cruel as to mean that. Look into my face, and tell me that I may soon claim you for my very own!"

"Papa will have something to say about that!" she declared, with a little silvery laugh as clear and sweet as the murmur of a mountain brook.

She was quite startled at the effect those words produced on her lover. His bonny handsome face was turned pale as death, and his hands shook like aspen leaves in the wind.

"Heaven help me! I had forgotten your father, Vesta!" he gasped.

"He is not formidable enough to frighten you," laughed the girl; but the smile died from her lips when she saw that it brought no answering one to the face of her lover.

"Listen to what I have to say, darling," he said, huskily. "Bitterly as I detect concealment, especially in love affairs, circumstances often alter cases. If your father knew that there was any sentiment between us—that we cared for each other—if you were not as true and staunch as steel to me he would part us just as surely as the sun shines."

"You misjudge papa," returned Vesta, eagerly; "my happiness is very dear to him. Why, I have never known a wish unfulfilled in all my life."

"This would be different, dear," said Ralph,

despondently. "Asking for diamonds, laces, or jewels is one thing, but choosing a husband is quite another. He would tell you that I was a fortune-hunter, and a thousand other things to turn you against me and make you hate me. And if anything like that should happen life would be all over for me. I do not mean that I would commit suicide or do anything rash, but that all joy, all hope, would be at an end for me. I would never want to look on the fair face of a woman again. Oh, Vesta, are you sure you care for me?"

"You have asked me that a score of times within the last two days," she replied, with a jaunty toss of her dark curly head, "and I shall not—"

"Vesta," he said, tremulously, "I beg you to be serious. I can talk lightly with other women and listen to their gay badinage, but I cannot bear it from you. Tell me truly, dear, do you love me well enough to marry me—to forsake all others and cling to me?"

"Come home with me and stay at the villa a week or so, and before you go away I will answer that question."

"Oh, darling! if you only knew your own heart, and was sure whether you cared for me or not! Ah! if I were but sure that you cared for me I would urge you to marry me this very night—ay, within the hour—and then I would feel sure of you, my bonny Vesta, and nothing save death could part us!"

She burst into tears, and instantly her young lover was kneeling by her side, kissing the great pearly drops away and begging her to forgive him for bringing them to those lovely eyes.

He clasped the slender figure closely in his arms, drew the curly head down upon his breast, and then she forgot all her woe listening to that sweet tale that is always so sweet to every young girl's ears—of his great, undying love for her, of the roseate future that lay before them if she would only marry him.

Vesta was only seventeen, and Ralph was her first and only lover. No wonder the words sounded sweet to her, and she was not loth to listen.

He did his best to persuade her to marry him then and there, but she would not consent.

"Do not trifle with me, dear," he cried, at length; "do not lead me on to love you so madly if you think my dreams might never be realised."

He was so handsome, so impetuous, so winning few young girls could have resisted wedding him without delay.

"I will tell you the truth, Mr. Stoddart," she said, shyly. "Before I left home papa called me to him in his study one day and said lightly, as he laid his hand on my head, 'I have just been reading a case in the morning's paper of a fair young girl who was wedded and widowed before she was sixteen. Now I have this much to say to you, Vesta, and I want you to think of it: 'Never marry until you are at least eighteen, my child. I want you to give me your solemn promise that you will not.'"

"And did you?" he asked, with breathless intensity.

"Yes," she returned, in a low voice.

A groan burst from the fair-moustached lips.

"What will become of me, Vesta?" he cried, bending his head down on his white hand. "That will be a whole year yet, and so much might happen in that time."

"It will quickly pass," she answered, bravely.

A sad smile illumined his face for an instant, then died away, leaving it paler than before.

"You almost plighted your troth to me this afternoon in the glen, and ratified that solemn pledge again to-night, and, darling, I—I do not wish to frighten you, but this I do say: in life or in death I will hold you to it; you shall be my bride, or you will go down unmarried to your grave. I must confess to you my grave fault, dear, but as it is an inherited

one—a trait common to men of my race—I cannot be held too strictly accountable for it. It is the curse of jealousy that I am afflicted with.

"Unreasonable as I know it is, I could not endure to see you talking with another man, apparently well pleased at the empty nothings whispered in your ear."

"I could not endure to see you in a ball-room waltzing with any other man than myself."

"I should feel like slaying any man who dared place his arm about you—though even in accordance with the strictest requirements of the walls; and if he attempted to make love to you, sweet, I—well, I am afraid it would end in a tragedy. When we Stoddarts love it is with all our heart—blindly, wholly, soully, and with a love surely the deepest, strongest, purest, and truest that ever beat in a man's heart! So do I love you, my little queen, my own Vesta!"

"I came across these words in a book yesterday, dear, and they have haunted me ever since. Listen, love, and see how true they are:

"Strangers but a week before,  
Giving pleasant word for word,  
Smile for smile, and nothing more.  
Can you tell what look or tone  
First this tide of feeling stirred?  
What strange tremor broke the calm  
Of our friendly greeting—gave  
Such tremulous, wild delight  
In the meeting of the eyes  
And the touch of palm to palm?  
All the gladness of good day,  
All the passion of good-night!  
Was it, then, a swift surprise  
To your soul as to my own?  
Did you watch the words unsaid  
On my lips, and dream awake  
All the long night for my sake—  
Lost in fancy's eager bliss  
At the phantom of—a kiss?  
Was it not enough for years—  
Wealth enough to last to death?  
What strong love beyond control—  
What so blent us, soul with soul,  
Pulse with pulse, and breath with breath?  
Love me if I live! Love me if I die!  
What to me is life or death  
So that though be nigh?  
Kiss me for my love, pay me for my pain;  
Come, and murmur in my ear  
How thou lovest me again."

The clock in an adjacent tower struck the hour of nine. Vesta drew back with a little cry from her lover's arms.

"I must go, Ralph," she cried. "I incur great risk by remaining here so long. What in the world should we do if Mrs. Latham but chanced to come this way and found me here?"

"I—I almost wish to Heaven that she would!" he cried, fervently. "I would then have the opportunity of protesting you with my name if I could but induce you to accept it. Oh, Vesta! I cannot bear to think that the final moment of parting has come for us! Try to resist as I may, I am quite sure it will end by my following you to Liver-pool."

"Good-bye, Ralph," she faltered.

"Oh, my darling! it is more bitter, more cruel than the pangs of death to part from you!" he sobbed, huskily.

Taking a photograph from his pocket he handed it to her.

"Will you keep this and look at it often, dear?" he whispered. "I make it almost a prayer that you will look at it every day. Then I will know that you cannot quite forget me, and—about writing. Vesta. Do they see your letters or ask whom they are from, or their contents?"

"No, they do not ask to read my letters because I always have scores of them from my girl-friends with every mail, and never one from a gentleman."

The wistful young lover breathed freer.

"Would you mind if I were to write to you, Vesta?" he asked. "Ah, do not refuse me that sweet boon!"

"Yes, you may write if you like," she answered, shyly, and, before he could stoop to thank her in the way he loved best she had fled through the arched gate like a moonbeam, and was quickly lost to sight amid the thick gloom beyond.

## CHAPTER IX.

It was quite early the next morning when the school carriage drew up in front of the railway station at Grassmere, and Mrs. Latham and Vesta alighted from the rickety vehicle.

A shade of disappointment clouded the girl's fair fresh face as she ran her dark eyes over the group that loitered there, and failed to find among them the one for whom she searched.

"I have not taken our tickets yet, and there is no one about to see to our luggage!" exclaimed Mrs. Latham, with asperity. "I do not see how I am to get this matter attended to. I declare such inattention and gross neglect of duty should be reported. I—"

"I beg your pardon, madame; can I be of any service to you?" asked a rich, mellow, indolent voice.

Mrs. Latham turned sharply around to find a fair-haired, handsome young man bowing low before her, hat in hand.

She was just about to give a curt refusal when she suddenly recognised him.

"You are the gentleman who rescued Miss South on the day of the dam disaster?" she asked, stiffly.

"I had that pleasure, madame," he said, smiling, but he did not dare then take more than a glance at Vesta, or give her more than a passing nod with those lynx's eyes watching him.

"At all events he is too modest, it seems, to force an acquaintance upon her through that unfortunate affair," thought Mrs. Latham, and she liked him all the better for that.

"You had better allow me to attend to your luggage for you this particular morning of all others," he persisted. "The train will be crowded. There is an excursion to somewhere. You have chosen the worst of all mornings for your trip. See, now that the train is due so shortly they begin to flock in this direction from all sides," and in less than a moment it seemed to Mrs. Latham the place was literally crowded with the noisy throng.

"I shall be glad to avail myself of your assistance, sir," she said, stiffly.

She would not have owed it to Vesta, but, nevertheless, she was highly pleased at the deft, quiet manner in which he did this little commission.

Ah, such a throng as there was by the train! Mrs. Latham was quite terrified.

Again she was glad to accept the services of the handsome Mr. Stoddart, for he was going, fortunately, by the same train to Liverpool, he informed them.

He did not look at Vesta as he made this announcement, but he guessed intuitively how surprised she must be, and the flush that must be on her dimpled cheeks. Was she pleased or sorry, he wondered?

The fact is, he had heard late the night before about the vast throng that train was expected to take down, and then and there he had made up his mind that Vesta should not trust her precious life among that promiscuous throng unless he was there to protect her.

The plan he had marked out for himself prospered better than he had dared hope for. He was fortunate enough to secure a seat beside his idol, and although he had no opportunity of exchanging so much as a word with her—Mrs. Latham kept him so busily conversing—yet the poor fellow felt he was in a seventh heaven.

Ah, well, the close proximity of the one we

love always makes us feel at peace with the whole world.

Ralph held Vesta's hand one sweet moment in parting, and he told himself that sweet privilege was worth all the dusty miles he had traversed.

When Vesta reached home she found the villa quite upset by the accident to her mother and the illness of her father.

Dora came to meet her with outstretched arms, happy tears shining in her grey eyes.

"I am so glad to have you home once more, dear," she cried. "The house seemed almost as desolate as the grave without you."

"But tell me one thing," said Dora, eagerly—"did you ever see that gentleman who rescued you that day? I mean, did you keep the appointment he made for me?"

"Yes," murmured Vesta, growing rosy red, "I saw him."

"Not more than that one time?" cried Dora in alarm.

"Yes," said Vesta, blushing rosier than ever, "I saw him every day. So there!"

"Oh, Vesta!"

"Oh, Dora!"

"Not—not by appointment, I hope?" gasped Dora Saville, horrified.

"I will not keep anything back from you, Dora, dear," she cried, laughing and sobbing in a breath. "I saw him every day—never by appointment—always quite by accident."

"Will you tell me about it, dear?" said Dora, with a troubled look on her beautiful, grave, kindly face. "Come to the conservatory with me."

Together the two girls quitted the library, and when they reached the conservatory Dora found a seat for Vesta, and took a seat by her side.

Dora looked straight into the depths of those dark, witching, fathomless eyes, and said gently: "Now tell me about it, dear—tell me all."

"You must not laugh at me," Vesta said, trembling visibly; "but after that first time I—I saw him often, and—I can't tell just how it was, but we learned to love each other dearly, and in a week's time, too! You know Juliet loved Romeo from the first moment she had seen him. Well, the upshot of the whole matter is I promised to marry Mr. Stoddart; but it can't be for a whole year yet—until I am eighteen, you know."

"Oh, Dora," she went on, enthusiastically, "You don't know how splendid he is—how much of a gentleman, and how he adores me!"

"I have a lovely photograph of him in my pocket. Thanks to fortune, neither mamma nor papa ever comes to my room, so I can put it on the mantel, just where the sun's first rays will catch it and light up my lover's fair, bonny face. Do you want to see the picture, Dora?"

"Yes," replied her cousin.

"I do believe that no girl ever had a more adorable lover than I," cried Vesta, proceeding to unravel the photo from her lace handkerchief.

Neither of them saw the tall form leaning idly against a large blossoming aloe-tree.

It was Henry South, the wealthy mill-owner, and it had been quite by chance that he had wandered in there.

He had no wish to disturb the girls, and was turning away when their conversation, quite by accident, fell upon his astounded ears.

Just as Vesta ceased speaking he turned abruptly about, pushed back the large palms, and faced her.

"Vesta!" he thundered—and there was that in his voice not pleasant to hear—"step into my library a moment!"

With a very flushed face she hastened to obey.

Turning the key in the lock, he faced her grimly.

"It is unnecessary to repeat what I heard you and Dora talking about," he said, angrily. "Now, I want to know the whole story, from first to last. How long has this

love-making been going on? Remember, I want a straightforward answer!"

Thus questioned, of course the girl replied, and truthfully, too.

Henry South brought his clinched fist down so heavily on the writing-table as to cause the inkstands to rattle.

"Now hear what I have to say in regard to this matter!" he hissed. "You shall give up this young man's acquaintance, and at once. You shall have no communication with him whatsoever. Disobey me at your peril! I mean what I say!"

Vesta sprang to her feet, her dark eyes flashing and her breast heaving.

"And I say that I will not give up my lover, papa!" she cried, vehemently. "Ask anything else of me, and I will gladly do it."

"The fellow is a white-handed dandy, of course, who goes about searching for a big stake, with only his handsome face for capital. Let him go farther with his heiress-hunting. I shall see to it that there is nothing of this sort going on until you are of age, my young lady!"

"I am sorry to disobey you for the first time in my life, papa," she said, steadily; "but, oh! I cannot give up my lover, papa."

"Let me see that picture," he commanded. Very reluctantly Vesta handed it out.

One glance, and it almost seemed to the terrified girl that her father was going mad.

In an instant he had flung it upon the floor as though it had been a scorpion, and set his heel upon the handsome upturned face, and curses so frightful they made Vesta almost drop dead at his feet were hurled from his lips. Never in the whole course of her life had she ever remembered seeing her father in a towering rage like this.

"Once for all, girl, will you obey me?" he thundered.

"Oh, papa!" wailed she, piteously, "ask anything else but that! I—I could not give my lover up and live, papa!"

## CHAPTER X.

VESTA SOUTH had never known a wish ungratified, never an unkind word, and this torrent of rage she had evoked in her father's heart appalled her, and for the first time in her life she cried herself to sleep that night; but through it all the thought never came to her to desert her handsome young lover.

"If I were to lose him life would never be the same to me," she sobbed, as she hurriedly made her toilet the next morning.

She found her father alone at the table when she descended to the breakfast-room.

"Good-morning, papa!" she cried, springing forward to give him his usual kiss, and attempting to clasp her arms about him.

To her amazement he repulsed her roughly.

"No!" he said, sternly, unclasping her white clinging arms, and pushing her from him. "I want no caresses from a disobedient daughter. When you dare defy my authority you build a wall between us which time can never break down—you widen a chasm between us which can never be bridged over. You must learn to forget this man, Vesta."

"I shall learn to die first, papa," the girl cried, passionately, and she added, sobbingly: "You have never refused me anything in my life, why should you thwart me now on this one thing on which I have set my heart?"

"It is for your sake, Vesta," he answered.

"If you loved a beggar, and he were a good man, you should have him. This Stoddart is a bad man, and you must forget all about him."

"He is not bad," she cried, "and if he has not been quite good all his life he will be now that he loves me. I shall make him good. Oh, papa! do not break my heart. I love him—I love him so dearly!"

And before he could prevent her, she was kneeling at his feet, her lovely, childish face raised to his with such wistful entreaty that his heart ached for her.



He raised her quickly in his arms. "Vesta, do you love this man so much?" he asked, huskily.

"So much!" she sobbed. "Better than all the world beside!"

"Do you love him better than me?" asked her father, slowly, his face whitening as he asked the question.

"It is so different, papa," murmured the girl, her fair face flushing. "When he is with me all the world seems bright; my heart is full of happiness; I want nothing else. I—I—would rather live on a crust of bread, if shared by him, than revel in luxury a princess might envy, if my path led away from him."

The proud old shipowner bowed his grey head on his hand with a deep groan.

"The man is a forger and a thief!" he exclaimed, excitedly, "and there is no crime that he is not familiar with. The fellow is in love with the money he expects I will leave you, not you, my poor Vesta. I would rather see you lying dead here at my feet than married to a man like that! Not a shilling of my money would ever go to you if you married that villain! I swear it!"

Vesta had drawn back from him, terrified at the fury she had evoked for the second time.

"From this time on," he cried fiercely, "have done with him. Never let his name be mentioned in this house or in my hearing again! Do you comprehend me?"

"You certainly speak plainly enough, papa," sobbed Vesta.

The rest of the morning meal was finished in silence, and was irksome enough.

When Mr. South arose from the table he crossed over to where Vesta sat, and laid a heavy hand on her dark, curly head.

"My little Vesta," he said, huskily, "think no more of that handsome, polished scoundrel, and I will make it worth your while. You shall have everything a young girl's heart could crave—parties, silks, and jewels that would purchase a king's ransom. I will do more. I will gratify a long cherished hope of yours—you shall accompany your mother and I to London for the season, if you desire."

There was no glad cry of delight from the pretty, red lips; they were mute.

What would the whole world be to her without the handsome fair-haired lover who had told her how much he loved her as they sat together under the blossoming apple boughs in the dear old glen?

"I disapprove most heartily, as I have always said, of girls of seventeen—mere chits—entering society, but circumstances alter cases materially. The best cure for the first attack of the romantic fever school-girls imagine to be genuine love is to mix with the world of men and women that comprises society at a fashionable watering-place. There they learn that handsome men can smile and play the gallant bean to every pretty girl that crosses their path. In short, they learn that the smiles of these handsome young fellows amount to nothing whatever. In nine cases out of ten they are fortune-hunting sharks. I have always said to myself that I would save my little Vesta from falling into their hands. But one of them found her out even in boarding-school. I thank Heaven I found him out in time to frustrate his hopes of my little girl's prospective fortune."

Vesta said never a word, and her father turned and walked slowly from the breakfast-room.

She rose from the table—she could not eat a mouthful; it seemed as though food choked her—and hurried out into the rose-garden, where she was sure to find her cousin.

She found Dora standing by the stone wall with a letter in her hand and a very puzzled look on her face.

"A boy just brought it here, and it is for you, Vesta," she said. "I wonder who it is from?"

A flush like the deep heart of a red rose spread over Vesta's face as she caught sight of the superscription.

"Oh, Dora, it is from Ralph!" she gasped.

"I—I—know the writing; every day he used to leave notes for me in the hollow tree in the glen."

With beating heart and trembling fingers she tore it open. It ran as follows:—

"MY DARLING VESTA.—I came on to Liverpool with the sole hope of being near you. I am summoned away by important business, but I cannot go until I have seen you. Will you try to come out into the grounds for a few minutes this evening? Let me look at you just once more before I leave you. I will not keep you long. Oh, believe me, Vesta, sweet, it is not my fault that I am compelled to have recourse to this underhand method of saying farewell. I would go to the house to ask for you but that I know quite well I should not be allowed to see you. Do not fail to come to me, darling. You will never realise how I shall count the moments. Your loving and ever-devoted

"RALPH."

(To be continued.)

## A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

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### CHAPTER XXVII.

MOST bad men are cowards at heart, and Roger Baldwin was no exception to the rule. The moment he saw Alfred Payne's stern face all his bravado and noisy bustling manner vanished, and he showed himself the craven he really was.

Perhaps there was no one in Dornington he would not have sooner faced than the surgeon, for he knew that Mr. Payne was fully aware of his antecedents—from the time when he started in Hillington as a money-lender to the day when he tried to entrap Lady Mary Adair into a marriage with him by threatening to ruin her father unless she became his wife.

The two men looked at each other for a couple of seconds, then Mr. Payne said, quietly,—

"You understand me, Mr. Baldwin, leave this house!"

"I shall not!" returned Baldwin, blustering a little. "Poor Herbert was my friend, and I have as much right to visit his family as you have!"

Mr. Payne took out his watch.

"Either you go quietly in five minutes, or I send for a policeman. That Mr. Herbert was your accomplice I fully admit. The pecuniary part of his obligations to you I am willing to discharge; but all acquaintance between you and his family must cease at once!"

"Miss Sinclair and I have already settled matters completely to our satisfaction. I am here at her request and invitation."

Mr. Payne coolly summoned Muriel to his presence, and asked her,—

"Is it true that you gave this man authority to open your mother's desk with his own key, and ransack the contents?"

"Certainly not!" answered the girl, gravely. "He told me a letter of considerable value to him had been mislaid by my stepfather, and asked my leave to search through Mr. Herbert's manuscripts for it."

"You hear, sir?" thundered the surgeon. "Now go! If you have any claim against Mr. Herbert send it in to me, and you shall be paid in full."

"Thanks!" said Baldwin, airily; "but Miss Sinclair and I have settled that. She has promised to be my wife, and I gave her as a betrothal gift all her stepfather's I O U's."

"How can you be so false?" asked Muriel, horror-struck. "Mr. Payne, he gave me the papers without any condition at all. I thanked him, for you see I was deceived, and thought he did it out of kindness; and then he asked me about a missing letter. You know papa had no secrets among his papers. They were only piles and piles of manuscripts, so I thought there could be no harm in Mr. Baldwin's looking through them."

"Don't reproach yourself, my dear!" said the surgeon, kindly. "An older head than yours might well have been deceived by this scoundrel's treachery. Now, Mr. Baldwin, the five minutes are almost gone. Will you leave this house, or shall I send for the police? If I give you in charge on the count of attempting a felony, things will go hardly with you, for Lord Haselmere will be called to prove your previous character, and you know the testimony he will give!"

Muriel was astonished at the change in the man she had so feared. His face turned almost yellow with fright, and he slunk out of the room like a beaten cur.

"There!" said Mr. Payne to her, as the door closed after Baldwin. "I don't fancy you'll be troubled with him again; but, if he does attempt to come here you must refuse to see him. My dear, how you tremble! Was he very objectionable in his manner to you?"

"He was very—polite!" said Muriel, the pause being made to find a word that described her meaning; "but, Mr. Payne, I seemed to feel his civility was not real, but only put on to gain something. He gave up the bill of sale and all Mr. Herbert's I O U's, and spoke quite considerably. I felt as though I must be an ungrateful wretch, because I kept asking myself what he did it for."

"He must have had some motive. He had not been in this room five minutes when I came, you say, and none of the papers are disturbed, so he must have gone straight for the desk."

"It is mamma's. She kept it here to be out of the children's way. She never uses it; but she sets great store by it. I think it was my own father's long ago."

"It has the initials H. S. R. engraved on it, I see. What was Mr. Sinclair's full name?"

"I have no idea!"

"My dear child! Has it ever struck you that you may have relations on your father's side able and willing to make your path through life much smoother than it has been lately?"

Muriel shook her head.

"I have never heard anything of my father except that he was very good."

"You cannot remember him, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! Mamma can never bear to speak of him; but I have always fancied he died of disappointment, because he could not make a name for himself. He was an artist, I think. I know he must have been very poor; for once, I think, I let mamma see I was astonished that she could have brought herself to marry Mr. Herbert, and she said she did it for my sake."

"It is clear to me Baldwin expected to find something of importance in this desk. Perhaps he knows more than you do about your parentage, Muriel, and has discovered you are an heiress?"

Muriel shook her head.

"I am sure I am not that!"

"Listen to me, my dear. Mr. Baldwin's attentions to you have been almost persecution; and I am told—I can't give up my authority—before he had ever seen you he proposed to Mr. Herbert for your hand. Now, Muriel, I daresay you know you are a pretty girl, and I am sure a good one, but I can't help fancying you had some other charm in Mr. Baldwin's eyes. Think how systematically he went about his courtship. He is by no means a liberal man, yet from the first to last his intimacy with Mr. Herbert must have cost him a considerable sum. The moment he hears of your stepfather's death he hurries here, and by a bribe disarms your hostility, and gets access to Mr. Herbert's private room. There he goes straight to your mother's desk. To my mind, Muriel, the thing is plain. He knows your father's family, and has discovered you are an heiress. He intended to share your good fortune by marrying you, and wanted to remove any proofs your mother might have of your birth lest he should lose his hold on you."

Muriel looked bewildered.

"You have made it seem very probable. But, Mr. Payne, I can't believe that I am an heiress."

"Well, my dear, will you give me leave to take this desk home with me and study its contents? If you have any claim to fortune I think they should be asserted for your mother's sake. If she recovers it will be a hard struggle for her to provide for all those little children."

"Please do just as you think best," said Muriel; "only if you do find I am to have any money please do not tell anyone in Dornington."

"Especially Mr. Gibson," concluded the surgeon, with a kindly smile at the blushing face. "Very well, Muriel. I think myself that young man is quite good enough even for an heiress. But I know he is very modest, so I will keep the secret of your good fortune."

"If I have any," corrected Muriel. "And please, Mr. Payne, you are not to think anything foolish."

It was some hours later when Royal Glenval came back to Paragon-street. He knew the truth then that Paul Melville was alive and soon to be restored to his friends, but he had not learned the crushing blow of his father's death.

He was still unconscious that he was already Lord St. Arvans when he poured out his heart to Muriel. He told her nothing of his rank or wealth, honours or fortune. He only said the dark shadow was lifted from his life, and he could once more hold up his head among his fellow-men. He was starting that very night for France, where his parents were staying. Would she let him take with him the promise that very soon she would be his wife?

"I will be a son to your mother, an elder brother to the children, Muriel, if only you will trust your future to me."

"You are so young," she said, wistfully, "only just beginning life. It seems cruel to lay such a burden upon you."

"Sweetheart, I love you so well that your troubles and anxieties must be mine. I have not spoken of my father's wealth, because I know such things will not weigh you. But he is a rich man, and I am his only son. Even if he does not increase my allowance on my marriage the income I had up to last September would be sufficient for us to live comfortably ourselves and help Mrs. Herbert."

"But he may be angry at your choosing a portionless wife."

"You do not know my father, dear. He is kindness itself. And even if I should be thrown entirely on my own resources, Muriel, I think we could make both ends meet. Won't you believe, my darling, I would rather marry you weighted with thirty half-brothers and sisters instead of ten than have to live out my life without you?"

She let her head rest upon his shoulder, and he knew things were to be as he wished.

"You shall be happy, dear, if love can make you so. I think, my Muriel, our married life will be all the brighter because we have shared some dark days together first. I never could have lived through these terrible months without your sympathy."

"You are looking ten years younger!" she said, gently. "Robert, how did you find out your fears were groundless?"

"Chiefly through seeing Miss Campbell here last night. She used to stay with some people near my home. I saw her here this afternoon, and she reassured me completely."

"Jessy is the dearest girl in the world!"

"Except Muriel," corrected her lover, archly.

"And she has had so much trouble," said Muriel.

"I know," his face grew grave. "But I think, Muriel, her sorrow, like mine, is nearly ended. I was able to give her Paul Melville's address, and I believe very soon he will be restored to her. We will send them the loveliest wedding present money can buy."

He could not stay much longer, for he had

still his interview with Dr. Netherton to detain him in Dornington. Muriel clung to him a little regretfully as he said good-bye.

"You will come back to me?" she pleaded, wistfully. "The time will seem so long while you are gone."

"I will come back the first moment I can; and Muriel, you must promise me not to let anyone persuade you into giving me up."

"I don't think anyone is likely to try."

When Jessy Campbell arrived that evening the two girls whose love-stories were so strangely entwined kissed each other in perfect silence. It really seemed at first as though their hearts were too full for speech.

Perhaps Jessy was the most relieved at the day's events, for she had not only the prospect of her lover's return, but the fearful doubt she had had of him was laid for ever; while Muriel had never believed one of the things Mr. Gibson had said against himself, and always cherished a firm faith the barrier between them would be removed in time.

Jessy Campbell had seen the *Times* since her interview with Lord Glenval, and knew the good old Earl was dead. She looked at Muriel in her plain cambric dress, busy about little domestic duties, and thought how astonished she would be when she heard she was to be a Countess!

She recollected the splendid rooms of St. Arvans Castle, and tried to fancy little Muriel reigning there. She recalled the costly pearls that had flashed on Lady St. Arvans' neck and arms on the night of the ball, and tried to picture her child-friend wearing those priceless gems.

"I am so happy!" breathed Muriel. "I think no one in the world can be so happy!"

"And you deserve it, dear!" said Jessy, stroking the pale cheek caressingly. "Muriel, I think you are the best girl I ever met. You have sacrificed everything to your mother and the children, and now happiness has come to reward you!"

"And we shall be friends always!" said Muriel, brightly. "Jessy, if Mr. Gibson could afford it I should so like to live near you at Warham."

"We shall not live at Warham, dear," said Jessy, thinking of the late Earl's horror if he could have heard his daughter-in-law elect planning to live near a linendraper's son. "Paul is to be a barrister, and so we must have a house in London. Kate has grown so steady and thoughtful I am sure she can take my place at home; but I wish Dornington was not so far in the country. I shall feel quite separated from mother!"

So they talked of their prospects, and made their plans, but Jessy would give no promise of great intimacy in the future. She seemed to Muriel most cold and unfriendly when she remarked they could never be intimate in the old girlish way again—the truth being Jessy had always before her the fact that "Robert Gibson's" wife would be a Countess, whereas the girl herself only dreamed of a position somewhat inferior to Mrs. Netherton's.

Muriel had no letter from her fiancé in the first days after their parting; nothing had been said about their correspondence, and she had actually no idea where to write to him.

Geoffrey Herbert was buried three days after the accident. His wife was pronounced out of danger, and Jessy came to sit with her and Muriel during the funeral, feeling they might give way to fretting if alone.

"Never mind," she said, in reply to Muriel's regrets at Mr. Gibson's silence. "Paul went away last November, and we have not exchanged a single letter, but our love is just the same. Your lover will very soon come back, Muriel, and that is better than letters!"

Mrs. Herbert was in a doze, the nurse sitting in her room, and so the two girls had repaired to the parlour, which was still considered Mr. Gibson's.

Jessy was going to leave Dornington in the morning. Mr. Melville would meet her at the large junction, where Mr. Gibson had encountered his friend Val last September. From

there they would travel to Holl, and thence embark for the nearest port to Bothanzen.

"So that it may be a long time before I see you again," concluded Jessy; "and I want you to promise Muriel not to misunderstand me if I don't write to you often. You see, dear, things are different now. You belong to your lover, and he may not like you to keep up your intimacy with me."

"Jessy!" Muriel's face was almost piteous in its perplexity. "Why do you say that?"

Miss Campbell was spared an answer by the entrance of Betsy.

"Two gentlemen had called to see Miss Sinclair. Their business was important. Were they to be let in?"

"Don't tremble so!" said Jessy, in a whisper, for poor Muriel imagined it to be two of Mr. Herbert's creditors. "You had better see them. I will stay with you if you like!"

Muriel did like, and so, when the eminently gentlemanly personages were shown in, they saw two young ladies instead of one.

"Have I the honour of addressing Miss Sinclair?" said Mr. Pierrepont to Jessy.

"No; this is Miss Sinclair. I am only staying with her because she did not feel up to business. Mr. Herbert's affairs are being arranged by Mr. Payne, the surgeon, and he would tell you more about them than we can."

The old gentleman smiled.

"My dear young lady," and he bowed amiably to Jessy. "We have nothing to do with Mr. Herbert's affairs, and your friend need not look so terrified. We are not the bearers of bad news!"

"I fear you must think me very rude," said Muriel, simply; "but we have had so much trouble I never seem to expect anything else. My stepfather has only been dead three days, and more than twenty people have come here to see me, and it always meant the same thing—bills!"

"It must have been a very trying position for you, but I hope brighter days are in store for you. Will you kindly tell me your age?"

"I shall be twenty-one next year!"

"And I think you entrusted a certain desk, supposed to contain family papers, to Mr. Payne, of Dornington."

"Yes. He seemed to think they ought to be in safe keeping."

"My dear young lady, if these papers had only been examined eight years ago they would have spared your grandfather a world of sorrow and remorse. He discarded your father on his marriage, though he was his favourite son. His penitent letters were suppressed by a treacherous elder brother, so that it was only in 1877, when your uncle died, that Lord Redmond learned how he had been deceived. His one object then was to find his missing son. He spent time and money fruitlessly in the search, and died full of regrets at his failure. Had we only been able to take his grandchild to him I believe he would have thought such a treasure cheaply purchased by his whole fortune."

"Poor old man! I wish I had seen him!"

"He was deceived by the agent he employed to trace his son. This Mr. Baldwin found a clue, but kept it entirely to himself. After Lord Redmond's death the fellow settled in this town and endeavoured to make your acquaintance."

Muriel blushed crimson.

"Mr. Baldwin was a friend of my stepfather, but I never liked him. I think now Mr. Herbert is dead we shall be free from him!"

"I will take care of that!" said Mr. Pierrepont, quietly. "My dear young lady, don't you understand your own position?"

"Not except that if only Lord Redmond had known he was my grandfather he would have been kind to me; but you say he is dead?"

Mr. Pierrepont thought he had never seen anyone so ignorant as to their own rights.

"Lord Redmond has been dead over a year. His eldest son died childless. You are the



sole representative of the younger son, Hugh St. Clare Redmond. When he grew poor and in difficulties he called himself by a corruption of his second name. I doubt if his wife knew any difference."

"Yes, she did," replied Muriel. "Mamma told me long ago I had a right to call myself St. Clare, but that she thought it sounded too grand and romantic for a daily governess."

"Well, my dear young lady, your true name is Muriel St. Clare Redmond, and ever since your grandfather died you have been Baroness Redmond of the Hall, Hillington. You have an income of several thousands a year, and a large amount of property in the funds. Lord Redmond died intestate, and so everything he possessed comes to you absolutely as his next-of-kin."

Muriel looked so hopelessly bewildered that Jessy came to the rescue.

"Don't you see, dear, your father would have been Lord Redmond, and as he had no son the title and everything comes to you."

"It may take a few weeks to get the legal business accomplished, but there is not the slightest flaw in the proofs. It is the clearest case I have ever had to deal with. I hope, Lady Redmond, you will leave your affairs in our charge. Our firm have been solicitors to the Redmond family for over a century, and my partner, Mr. Oldfoot and myself trust to continue to act for you."

Then Muriel found her voice.

"I shall be very grateful to you, sir," she said, simply. "I never dreamed of this, but for my mother's sake I am thankful. I shall be able to help her and the children."

"You will be able to provide for Mrs. Herbert and her family out of the money in the funds," said Mr. Pierrepont. "There may be a difficulty in arranging it until you are of age, but I need not tell you we shall be happy to do all in our power to assist you."

"And am I really Lady Redmond—are you sure?"

"Perfectly."

"Then would you do this one thing for me?" she blushed painfully. "We have been very poor here, and I can't bear the idea of suddenly growing rich and going away with a flourish of trumpets. Will you keep all this a secret, and let me be plain Muriel Sinclair while we stay in Dornington?"

And as lawyers do not often oppose a rich and influential client, Muriel, Lady Redmond, had her own way.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE June day Paul Smith was sitting in his little study, playing over the accompaniment to a part song, in which he was to assist the Choral Society that evening.

Ten weeks of perfect quiet and freedom from agitation had done their work. He had never looked better, not even in the old days when he rowed in his college boat at Oxford, and was remarked by all spectators for his strength and vigour.

"If only something would break this awful spell," thought the poor fellow, sadly. "I declare I feel inclined to go over to England, and run down to Oxford. Surely, someone there would remember me, and tell me my own name. But I suppose they would think me mad for asking them, so it would hardly do."

Someone had entered the room unheeded. A girl's hand was laid on his shoulder; the face he loved best on earth was raised to his own. Then a wonderful thing happened.

Either the doctors were right in declaring nothing but a sudden shock would restore the missing chord and give Paul back his memory, or an old proverb, "Love is the best physician," was still true.

Paul stooped and kissed the upturned lips. He drew his darling to his heart; and with the one word "Jessy" the floodgates of memory were unlocked. He could recall every incident of his life up to the time of his being stricken with the fever.

"I remember—I was on the track—and when I came here I heard that he was dead. Then it seemed to me had I only told what I knew at the time of his disappearance he might have been brought back before he took the journey that killed him."

"You mean Lord Glenval?"

"How did you guess it, dear?"

"Never mind. Paul, we have a great deal to be thankful for. He is alive and well. I saw him just about a week ago, and he was then starting to join his relations in Paris."

"Jessy!"

"He thought he had killed you, poor fellow, and was hiding from justice. When his friend, Robert Gibson, was killed he took his name, that is why none of the detectives his father employed could find him. He has been teaching in a school all these months. Your kind friend, Dr. Zoden, wrote once to ask if he could suggest any clue to your identity, speaking of you as 'Paul Smith.' The name Paul aroused his attention, and he came to me with the faint hope all his remorse for having killed you had been needless."

"And how did you get to Rothausen?" demanded Paul. "Jessy, I feel as if you had saved my reason."

A knock at the door, rather trembling. It was John Melville. He had begged of Jessy to go in alone.

"Dear child, if I went and he did not know me it would break my heart. I will follow you in a few minutes."

"Open the door, Paul," commanded his betrothed, "and then you will understand how I managed to get to Rothausen."

"Father!"

"My son!"

The English are not a demonstrative people, but the tears were in John Melville's eyes, and Paul's were not dry. It was no common meeting this. The elder man felt as though his son had been given back to him from the grave; while to Paul love, happiness, peace and memory were all restored in one moment.

That Dr. Zoden and his friend Dr. Hautmann hurried to congratulate "Paul Smith" may readily be believed. Count Dagenbert and his sons joined the group for the same purpose. The Countess, a very fine lady indeed, sent a special message, begging that the strangers would become her guests at the Castle, and promising that she herself would fasten the myrtle wreath on the bride's hair.

It cannot be said that Jessy had ever thought of being married in a foreign land; but both Mr. Melville and Paul caught at the idea.

Paul was anxious to remain at Rothausen till August, so as not to inconvenience his friends by the sudden loss of his services.

It was impossible for his father to spend two months away from his native land, while he would not hear of leaving his boy alone in Germany, evidently thinking the strange loss of memory would return if Paul had not someone always at hand to remind him of his own identity.

In the end the Countess had her way. Jessy loved Paul too true to have any punctilious scruples about coming to him so suddenly. She felt, like Mr. Melville, averse to his staying alone in Rothausen, and she fully shared his wishes not to act ungratefully to Dr. Zoden or the Count.

So all arrangements were made, and the wedding took place just a fortnight after Jessy had broken the spell of oblivion cast over Paul.

There was not a single English guest at the wedding except Mr. Melville, who gave his favourite away, or, rather, fulfilled the part most akin to that function in the Lutheran service.

The relatives on both sides mostly deferred their presents until the happy pair should return to England. Nevertheless, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Melville received two wedding gifts on their marriage day from a distance—a string of pearls of almost priceless value, with a few lines of friendly greeting, signed "St. Arvans," and a locket set with diamonds from

the young peeress, Muriel Lady Redmond, who had still, however, refused to assume her title.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

IT WAS the very day of his father's funeral that Royal reached Paris. The sad cortege had left the house, and Miss Dundas was sitting with the hapless widow and her daughters, when the message came that a gentleman from England desired to see her on urgent business.

The kind old maid always declared afterwards she felt something was going to happen. She went downstairs very quietly to the little room the late Earl had used as a study, and then her hands were caught in a fervent grasp, and the voice she had despaired of hearing again in life asked brokenly,—

"How is my mother?"

"Royal!" cried Mrs. Dundas, who was never sure afterwards she did not kiss him. "Royal! is it really you?"

"It is, indeed!" and he gave her a short vision of his terrible ordeal. How, believing he had taken young Melville's life, he had been a fugitive—how, through never opening a newspaper, he had missed seeing the report of his own disappearance.

"I was so light-hearted when I heard the truth, and was free to come back to my dear ones," he said, sadly, "and now it is too late! I shall never hear my father's voice again!"

"He loved you always, Lord Glenval. When he was dying he left his dear love for you. It seemed to us an earnest, in spite of the mystery of your fate, that we should yet find you!"

"Dear Miss Dundas, please call me Royal," said the young man, earnestly. "And now I want you to break it to my mother and the girls. Is Alice here? They tell me she is married?"

"She is married to one of the best men I ever met!" said the governess; "but she is here now. He has gone—to Père la Chaise. Royal understood."

"And you think I may see my mother? The shock won't hurt her?"

"Joy rarely hurts anyone. But if you like I will prepare her for your coming."

And so the widow's tears were changed into tears of joy; and, though the husband of her youth had left her, she was content, for her only son, her first-born, was restored to her.

Dr. Galpin and his new-found brother-in-law had a long business conversation that night.

"In your place," said the physician, "I should offer no explanation at all. Your mother and sisters know the truth. You have no near relations or very intimate friends, and the world at large must be satisfied to see you back again without any particular details as to your proceedings. Seriously, Royal, you had best keep silent. The whole truth you cannot tell without paining at least two people, Paul Melville and his fiancée. Partial explanations are always dangerous. Take my advice and keep silent. Believe me, whatever curiosity or suspicion is abroad it is better to 'live it down.' There is but one person to whom I would advise you to disclose the story of these eight months."

"And that is?"

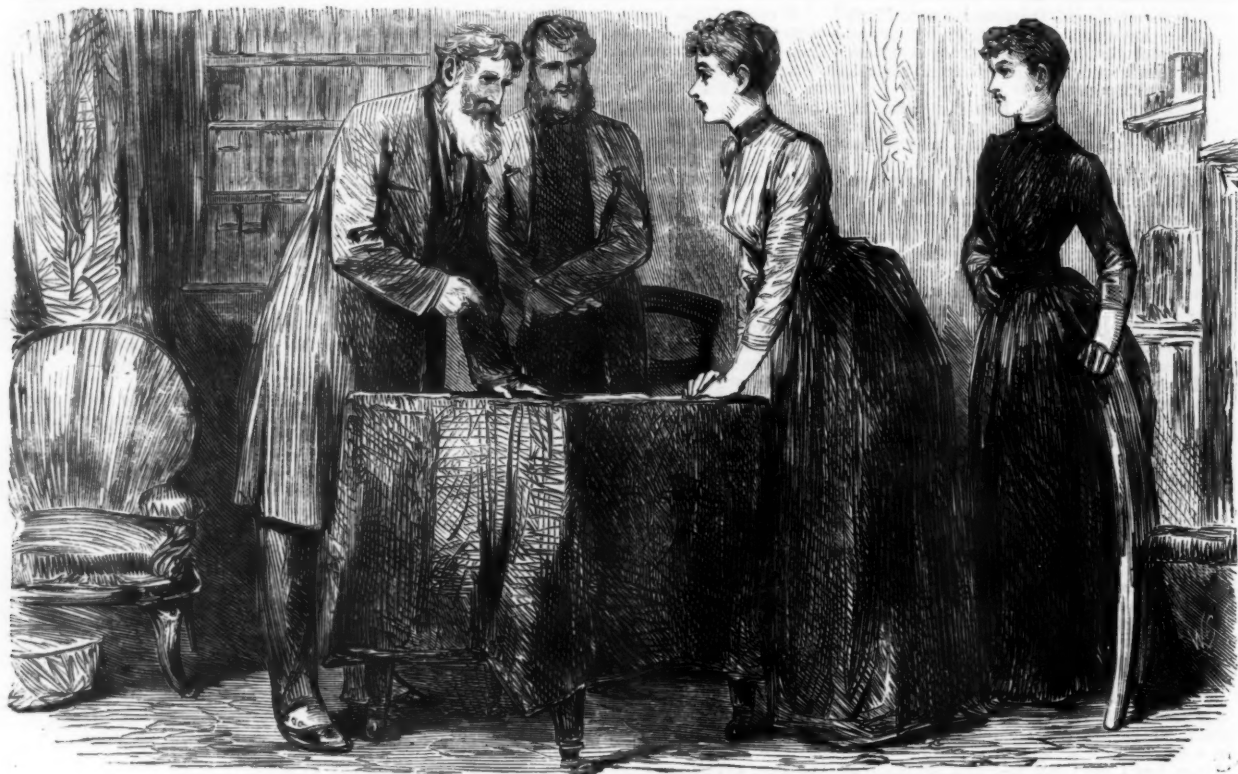
"Your wife—the future Countess St. Arvans."

"Oh, she knows already."

"You don't mean that you are married?"

"No, only engaged. She knows everything except that I am my father's son. Muriel is worthy to be a duchess, but her family are terribly poor, and she is so humble-minded the mere thought of being 'my lady' would alarm her."

Lord St. Arvans took his mother and sisters home to England, and left them at the Castle. Then, when every legal formality had been complied with, three weeks after he left Dornington, he was free to return there, taking his mother's tender congratulations to Muriel, and a promise that Lady St. Arvans would welcome her warmly for her boy's sake.



[ "AND AM I REALLY LADY REDMOND ? " SAID MURIEL ]

One painful task Royal had performed in Paris. He had to break to poor Dolores Glenval the sad fate of Robert Gibson, and how no winter frost or summer sunshine could bring him back to her. The girl's resignation touched him deeply.

"He loved me to the end," she said, quietly, "and he suffered no pain. It would have hurt him terribly to see me like this. Perhaps we should have had to say good-bye. Maybe it is better for us as it is. I shall not be a cripple in Heaven, and I shall go to him, though he can never return to me."

Face to face in the old familiar parlour the two who had known each other as Muriel Sinclair and Robert Gibson met again. Each had a confession to make, each a secret to disclose. Muriel buried her head on her lover's shoulder as she whispered her story.

"I think I'm sorry, sweetheart," he answered, tenderly. "I wanted you to owe everything to me. But I don't mind whether you are Muriel Sinclair or Lady Redmond now so long that you promise soon to be my much-loved wife, the Countess of St. Arvans."

So, though the engagement sprang from the purest, sincerest love on both sides, it was, after all, what the world calls "a most suitable match"—an English earl of princely wealth and the last of a grand old race, Lady Redmond of Hillington.

Poor Mrs. Herbert was bewildered, indeed, when she learned her daughter's grandeur.

Royal, who had grown to esteem her very truly, was only too ready to join with Muriel in making a suitable provision for her. So they bought a beautiful old-fashioned house at Hillington, not far from the Hall, and furnished it completely; and then, when Mrs. Herbert was well enough to travel, she was taken there for "change of air," to find all her children already delighting in the large garden and airy rooms, and to be assured by Muriel it was hers for always.

Nor did Lord St. Arvans rest there with

generosity. By his marriage settlements the Redmond estate was charged with an allowance of two thousand a-year to Mrs. Herbert for her life, and he told Muriel they must see to the children, launching the boys in life and portioning the girls.

"They have no claim on the Redmond property Mr. Pierpoint says, so we must take care of them ourselves."

Royal and Muriel had to defer their wedding some months after Jessy's. An earl and countess cannot do things as hurriedly as an embryo barrister and his portionless wife. There were settlements and deeds and other legal business, besides a fancy of the widowed Lady St. Arvans that the marriage ought not to take place until six months after her husband's death.

Royal declared the delays were interminable. He was always grumbling at the lawyer's slowness, and ran down to Hillington every week from Saturday to Monday to relieve his feelings.

Muriel had been introduced to her future sisters, and liked them very much.

At any rate, for the present their home was to be with their mother at St. Arvans, for the Earl and Countess meant to pass a portion of each year in London besides making Redmond Hall their chief country home, so that probably until his sisters married Royal and his wife would only be guests at Warham.

And Royal's patience was rewarded at last. When the new year was but a few days old, and the snow lay thick upon the ground, there was a grand wedding at Hillington.

Dr. Netherton performed the ceremony, and Alfred Payne gave away the bride. There was every possible splendour that could be imagined, for Royal insisted on doing honour to his choice; and no one who witnessed the dazzling sight would have guessed that twelve months before both bride and bridegroom had lived in Paragon-street, Dornington, and earned their living by teaching.

Paul Melville was called to the Bar, and bids fair to become a successful barrister. His old pride has never been so rampant since his marriage. Perhaps London is a wider field than Warham, and so he does not feel the sting of having a father "in trade;" and, besides, he has learned to reverence that father as he deserved, and he no longer holds aloof from everyone with a tittle under the belief they will despise him.

In short, Paul has been tried in the fire of adversity, and the true gold of his character now shines more brightly. His fair wife is devoted to him, his friends admire him, and not long since he successfully contested a suburban borough at the election, and was returned at the head of the poll.

That Paul Melville, M.P., is an eminently prosperous man everyone admits. Old politicians hold there is no dignity to which he may not aspire, and clients pour in to him greedily, so that his "briefs" are many.

But he still retains his simple, unaffected manners, and in his rare holidays he takes his wife neither to a fashionable watering-place nor famous foreign city, but to a quiet little homely village in Germany, which, but for its being near a university, would be utterly unknown.

They meet no English tourists here, but an old German doctor hails them as familiar friends, and is always anxious to hear whether the Herr Melville has suffered any return of his distressing malady.

And Paul answers truly "No," for never since the moment when Jessy's lips broke the spell illness had cast over him has the terrible forgetfulness attacked him. But never even now can he look back upon those months without a shudder. He cannot forget all he suffered—ay, and made others suffer, too—after his passionate jealousy had brought upon Lord Glenval A TERRIBLE ORDEAL.

[THE END.]





[THE EARL SHRANK BEFORE ADINE'S INDIGNANT LOOK, AND VAINLY WISHED HIS WORDS UNSAID!]

SERIAL.]

## LADY ROSLYN'S MYSTERY.

—O—

## CHAPTER XV.

As a beam o'er the face of the waters may glow,  
While the tide runs in darkness and coldness below,  
So the cheeks may be ting'd with a warm, sunny smile.

Though the cold heart to ruin runs darkly the while;  
One fatal remembrance, one sorrow that throws  
Its black shade alike o'er our joys and our woes,  
To which life nothing darker or brighter can bring,  
For which joy has no balm and affliction no sting.

—Moore.

LORD ROSLYN, half beside himself at the fatal discovery he had made of the presence of the nocturnal visitor in the chamber of his bride, had taken but a few steps towards the mansion when he came upon a figure, which was leaning carelessly against a tree, attentively regarding the window of the Countess.

This figure was that of the Hon. Vayle Malvern.

A half-burned cigar was in his mouth, explaining why he had sought the lawn at that late hour.

The Earl had scarcely observed him, when he started, recognising his lordship, and a look of the wildest alarm, which might have been partly feigned, crossed his face.

"Good heavens, Roslyn! You here!" he exclaimed, as if involuntarily.

"Yes, I was taking an evening stroll," replied the Earl, agitatedly, yet striving to conceal his emotion from the gaze of his relative.

"Then you have seen nothing?" inquired Malvern. "You have seen no one—"

He stopped, as if unable to finish the interrogation.

Roslyn groaned unconsciously.

"What have you seen, Vayle?" said his lordship.

Malvern shot a quick, scrutinising glance up into the deathly-white face of the Earl, and replied,—

"You will never forgive me, Roslyn—"

"Speak!" was the impatient command.

"Then, since you will have it, I will tell you all that I have seen. I came out here half-an-hour or more since to smoke a cigar, for I felt restless and sleepless. I took a turn down the avenue, and, as I came up, Lady Roslyn's window attracted my attention, it being half open, as at this moment. While I looked a man crept up from the shrubbery, ascended the tree, and mounted to the balcony. He stopped there a moment, peering into the room, and then went in. He stayed there until now!"

"Why did you not come and inform me?"

"Because I did not know that you were not there, or that Lady Roslyn was alone!"

"The man might have been a robber. I don't doubt but that he was," declared the Earl, the idea suddenly suggesting itself to his mind.

"Had he been a robber, Roslyn, some outcry must have been made. He was not a robber!"

Lord Roslyn had moved away, but he now turned abruptly, and came back to his relative.

"Do you understand what you insinuate, Malvern?" he demanded, in a harsh, hollow, voice. "How do you dare to think that this intruder was not a robber? Do you think that my wife—a Bayton, too—would admit a gentleman to a midnight interview in her boudoir? Explain yourself, or by heavens—"

"Hold, my lord. Since you force me to explain, I will do so. I think I can prove this man to have been no robber. After you left me in the drawing-room on your bridal night, retiring to your study, I came out upon the lawn to calm myself, after our not very pleasant interview. And I swear to you that I beheld on that evening this same individual emerge from Lady Roslyn's boudoir, and descend in the same manner that you have witnessed this evening!"

There was a tone of sincerity and earnestness in Malvern's voice as he made this revelation—a revelation which had not before escaped his lips, and which he had treasured against a moment when it should overwhelm the young Countess with ruin. This sincerity struck to the heart of the bridegroom like an assassin's knife, and he reeled and fell heavily against a tree.

"You are ill, my lord—"

"No, no!" declared the Earl, faintly. "I am quite well. I had a momentary illness, but it was nothing!"

He turned away his head, while Malvern puffed uneasily at his cigar, and finally threw it upon the ground, where it glowed and sparkled until it died out in ashes.

"Vayle," said Lord Roslyn, after a long silence, "I do not consider your words proven—that this man was no robber. Did you see his face?"

"No. I was not near enough?"

"Did you have any suspicion as to his identity?"

"I wish you would not ask me, my lord!" said Malvern, hesitatingly.

"I not only ask, but I demand an answer!"

"Since I must tell you, I must. I thought the man was Harold Bevan!"

"Harold Bevan! In my wife's chamber!" ejaculated the Earl, as if appalled. "The idea is preposterous. You must have lost your senses, Malvern. I tell you the man was a robber. I don't doubt but that while he was rummaging her boudoir Lady Roslyn was locked in her dressing-room attended by her maid. The fellow could not have been detected on his previous visit, or he would not have returned. You should have told me of that

visit sooner, Vayle, for he may have stolen something of value."

"I wish I had told you, my lord," said Malvern, with affected humility. "The man was doubtless not Bovan, but a robber, as you suggest."

"Keep the matter secret, my dear fellow, and say nothing more to me about it," remarked the Earl, steadying his voice and heart, under the conviction that the mysterious intruder had been merely a thief. "You understand, of course, that it would not be pleasing to me to have the affair made known until I choose to do it myself."

Malvern assented, and gave the required promise.

"I must go in," then declared Lord Roslyn, "and learn if anything has been stolen."

He turned on his heel and made his way into the house, while Malvern looked after him with a strange, subtle gleam in his eyes.

"This 'affair,' as Roslyn terms it, is likely to tend to my advantage," he muttered, in a tone of satisfaction. "The man was no robber, and I am sure he was Harold Bovan. Who would have thought that her ladyship would have turned so? A separation will follow, I hope, and Roslyn will have a woman kind, and I shall be his successor. Glorious!"

While he was thus exulting over his prospective grandeur the Earl hastened to his bride's boudoir, which he entered after a preliminary knocking upon the door.

Lady Roslyn was still seated in the chair in which Count Leobelle had left her, but her attitude was now drooping and desponding, and her face was half-concealed by one jewelled hand.

She did not hear her husband's entrance, and he regarded her for a full minute in perfect silence, doing homage to her perfect loveliness with a heart overflowing with his passionate love for her.

It was no wonder that his look was full of adoration.

Her dressing-gown of white Indian muslin fell away from her slender, column-like throat, and was caught together above her bosom by a spray of bright red coral; her wide sleeves fell back from her dainty wrists, displaying her beautiful, rounded arms, half-shaded by the wide fall of costly lace; and, to crown all, her pale golden hair fell around her like a glittering shower, rippling over her shoulders to her delicate, slender waist.

In that moment Lord Roslyn confessed to himself that he worshipped his young bride. The torture of the past half-hour had developed his awakening love into a strong, all-enduring passion, beside which his former affection for Mrs. Adrian was a petty, boyish fancy.

"Adine," he said, softly, coming forward to her side.

She started, springing up with a look of wild alarm, but as she encountered his grave, quiet gaze she calmed herself and resumed her seat.

"I thought it was Lucette," she murmured, scarcely knowing what she said.

"You thought it was Lucette who called you 'Adine,'" exclaimed the Earl, in a surprised tone, as he took possession of a chair beside his bride.

A quick glow overspread the sweet face of the young Countess, and a frightened look momentarily appeared in her grey eyes, but it fled, as she said,—

"Did I say that, Eustace? The truth is, I was frightened by your sudden appearance, and did not hear you call my name. It was the sound of your voice that aroused me, not the word you used."

"Where is Lucette, Adine?"

"I don't know. I have not seen her this evening. I excused her from attendance upon me when I had finished my dinner-toilette."

A faint shadow crept over the Earl's countenance, and he looked steadily into his wife's drooping face.

As he looked, the conviction grew upon him that the only pure and innocent of

any wrong to him or to herself; that features so perfect as hers could not conceal a guileful heart; that she was as she looked—an angel.

The man, he mentally decided, had certainly been a robber.

He studied how to break to her the news that her boudoir had been twice invaded by a person covetous of her wealth or diamonds, and how to learn if anything had been taken by him.

"Adine," he said, at last, "How long have you been in your boudoir?"

"Ever since you came up from the drawing-room," she said, unguardedly. "Why do you ask, Eustace?"

"Ever since you came up from the drawing-room?" he repeated anxiously.

His manner impressed her. She grew pale, and avoided his glance.

"Were you not absent from this room a few minutes—half an hour?" he inquired.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because, Adine, if you have been in this room all the time you must have been terribly alarmed. I was on the lawn just now—do not be startled!—and saw a man coming out of this room upon the balcony. He descended to the ground by the tree that shades your window. I wish I had been near enough to catch him. Why, how you tremble, Adine!"

The poor young bride did tremble like a leaf in the wind, and her face was ghastly in its pallor. She covered it with her hands, fearing that her husband's eyes would obtain from it a clue to her terrible secret.

"How I have frightened you, Adine! Did you see this robber?"

"I have seen no robber!" she answered, in a faint whisper.

"Then you were not in the room?" he asked, puzzled.

"Yes, I fear I was," she said, scarcely able to speak at all, and so desolate at that moment that she would gladly have died. "I—I have been sitting here all the evening since I came up. I must have been leaning back in my chair—"

"Asleep?"

Her silence was interpreted as assent.

"We must keep those windows closed in the evening hereafter," declared the Earl. "That tree is too near the house, and a thief would be tempted to enter often when such facilities are afforded. Vayle Malvern saw that fellow come and go this evening, and he says he saw him leave this room in the same manner on our bridal night!"

The Countess gasped for breath, and her husband saw the colour come and go in the parts of her face uncovered by her hand.

"Do not be so alarmed, Adine," he said, longing, yet not daring, to soothe her by caresses and endearments. The danger is past now. Let us see if you have lost anything. Where is your purse?"

"In my dressing-room."

"And your jewel-casket?"

"In the same place."

"There seems to be nothing missing from this room, Adine, and, as you were asleep, the fellow may have penetrated to your dressing-chamber. I will see!"

He arose and passed into the next room.

And then the youthful Countess uncovered her face, disclosing such a pale, anguished countenance as would have alarmed the Earl beyond measure had he but seen it.

"Oh, Heaven, pity me!" she whispered, clasping her hands tightly together, and looking upward with a wild, tearless gaze. "This is more than I can bear! Would to Heaven that I were dead!"

That wild prayer was uttered with a wailing cry that was laden with horror and despair.

The cry had died away, and her face had assumed a look of stony calmness when the Earl returned with her jewel-casket and velvet purse.

He resumed his seat at her side, and handed her the unopened purse, remarking,—

"Look, Adine, and see if anything be gone!"

The Countess went through the mockery of examining her purse, emptying its gold and bank-notes into her lap, but she restored them, declaring that her purse had been untouched.

"It was jewellery he sought, then," said the Earl, placing the jewel-casket on her knees. Examine your casket, Adine, and let us see what is missing!"

With a sensation of faintness, and a longing to fling the casket and its contents from her and rush away, the young wife turned the tiny gold key in its lock, and lifted the lid of the box of treasures.

The top tray was literally covered with gleaming jewels, bracelets, brooches, and rings.

"Strange," said Lord Roslyn, knitting his brow.

"Nothing is gone from this tray. But the fellow may have been artful enough to take those that were kept beneath. The box is too heavy for you to hold. Let me set it on the table!"

He did so, and drew the table nearer.

With trembling hands that almost refused to perform their share in the mockery, and with tearless eyes which yet could see nothing of her gems but a strange sparkling and flickering of light, the young Countess lifted out the top tray, and revealed a second, not inferior in its display of wealth.

There were tiaras and necklaces of immense value, gorgeous eastern gems, some of them, with imperfect cutting and singular setting, yet many of them worth a prince's ransom.

These were the heirlooms of the Roslyn family.

Many a Countess of Roslyn had clasped those diamond tiaras above her haughty brows; many a Countess of Roslyn had worn those sparkling necklaces above her proud heart.

"I wonder those were not taken," said the Earl.

Another tray was revealed, and pear-shaped pearls, sapphires, with the blue of a summer sky in them, rubies no brighter than the lips of their fair owner, great glowing carbuncles in quaint settings, pale amethysts, and other valuable gems were exposed to the sight in such profusion that they suggested visions of Aladdin's gorgeous palace, with its eastern luxuriance of precious stones.

"They are all here," exclaimed Lord Roslyn.

"The Sayton diamonds that descended to you from your grandmother, your bridal gifts, the Roslyn jewels, the gems Hubert gave you from the stores that came to him with his title and estates—yes, they are all here. Nothing seems to be missing."

The Countess breathed more freely, and hastened to restore the trays to their rightful position.

"Yet stay!" cried the Earl, arresting her movements by putting his hand upon her arm. "I did not see the star bracelet—my mother's bracelet. Let me look again."

Lady Roslyn leaned back in her chair, paralysed with apprehension, while the Earl searched the casket thoroughly.

"It is gone!" he exclaimed. "It is surely gone, Adine."

"Gone!" she whispered.

"Yes; it is not here. Can it be lying in your dressing-room?"

She shook her head.

"It is stolen, then. I would rather anything else had been taken than that," said his lordship. "I had so many tender associations connected with that, Adine. My mother loved to wear it, and in my early boyhood I delighted to watch the flashing of those jewels on her arm. Then you wore it after our betrothal, and his voice grew softer. 'It seems as if I had lost a friend, Adine.'"

He looked into her pale face, and added,—  
"I am grieving you by my regrets? The bangle was not worth one tear from your eyes, Adine. But it shall be restored to you, and



this bold thief shall be punished. I will get a detective—"

"No, Eustace, no!" cried his young wife, pleadingly. "I may find it among my effects. I know I shall have it back again in a few days. I feel that I shall. I beg you not to see a detective. There was no thief, I am convinced. You did but dream—"

"But Malvern saw him too."

"He was mistaken. Oh, Eustace, promise me not to say a word to any one of my loss. Grant me but a few days to search for the bracelet, I implore you—"

Her voice broke down in sobs.

Lord Roslyn was puzzled by her manner, and vague suspicions that all was not right obtruded themselves upon his mind.

With an air of gentle authority, he took both her flustering heads in his, and looked steadfastly into her eyes, compelling her answering gaze.

She did not regard him with the honest, straightforward look that characterised her, but her glance was wild and full of pleading.

"Adine, I know not what to think," he said, gravely.

She uttered a low, hopeless cry.

"The bracelet is gone, and that would argue that the intruder was a thief. And yet—Adine, I would ask you a single question. I scarcely dare ask it, but I offend you beyond forgiveness. Yet I must know, and, as your husband, I entreat, I command you to answer. Was that man who visited your chamber on your bridal night, and again this evening—was he Harold Bayan?"

As he uttered the name, the Earl looked ashamed of his question.

He was not prepared for the answer.

His young wife flung off his clasping hands, the colour mounted to her cheeks, her grey eyes deepened in colour and flashed and glowed like jewels, and she sprang up and stood before him, indignant, humiliated, and outraged by his inquiry.

"Eustace!" she ejaculated, with gasping breath, and pressing her hand to her heart, as if an arrow had lodged there. "Eustace," and now she drew herself up proudly and scornfully before him. "Did I hear you aught?"

The Earl shrank before her scornful, indignant look, and vainly wished his words unsaid.

How could he have been mad enough to utter them? he asked himself.

He was sufficiently versed in the study of human nature to know that her scorn and indignation were real and that his question had been an insult to her.

"Adine, hear me?" he said, deprecatingly.

The tables were turned now. It was he who trembled, and his bride who was judge.

She regarded him coldly and haughtily.

"I do not wish to hear you," she said.

"But, Adine, I beg you to forgive me. I was mad."

"I do forgive you, Lord Roslyn," she said, coolly. "But I assure you that by your suspicious you have raised between us a barrier which shall never be overthrown."

"Oh, Adine!" he cried, the story of his love trembling upon his tongue.

"I wish to hear no more," she said, with dreary coldness. "We have nothing in common. I never loved you, but now I think I loathe you. Remember the terms of our compact, Eustace Roslyn, and go your way, while I go mine. And now please leave me alone."

The Earl endeavoured to explain his conduct, but her coldness did not relax, and he was finally obliged to obey her command.

With a long, pleading look at her, as she stood under the chandelier, in all her glittering beauty and loveliness, he turned to quit the room.

Before he had reached the door he caught sight of a glove, which he hastily picked up and examined.

It was small, but evidently a gentleman's

glove. The hid was of the finest quality, and there was about it a faint, sweet perfume.

With lips that grew whiter than before under his black moustache the Earl thrust the glove into his pocket without being seen, and withdrew, retiring to his study, where he locked himself in.

When she found herself alone the young wife's coldness and calmness deserted her, and she sank upon her knees, moaning and weeping.

"Oh, Heaven, pity me!" she whispered. "How my own husband has dared to insult me, and even Malvern suspects that I am not worthy of my name and rank. And yet, what would they say if they knew the truth? What would the Earl say if he knew but the faintest breath of my awful secret? What will be the end? I feel that I am at the beginning of a fearful drama, in which I shall have to play a terrible part. Would that it were ended!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

Alone! alone! how drear it is!

—Wallis.

I am alone and yet

In the still solitude there is a rush

Around me as were met

A crowd of viewless wings; I hear a gush  
Of uttered harmonies.—G. W. Bethune.

The days went drearily by at Anserly Lodge. Mrs. Polack did not again rise from her bed, to which she had taken on the day of Alix's rescue of the miller's child from the waters of Teuton Brook, and the village physician now openly attended her, coming twice or thrice a day. He did not visit her with the hope of subduing the terrible disease preying upon her life, and now drawing fearfully near her heart, or even of warring off the end, which grew nearer with every hour, but to administer narcotics and soothing potions under the influence of which the invalid slept much of the time, and so was insensible to most of her pain.

All hope had been relinquished.

Sitting by the side of Mrs. Polack in the still night time, and watching anxiously her laboured breathing, Alix Erla had schooled her heart to bear what was inevitable, and thenceforth no tears were shed by her in the presence of her dying friend, and she uttered no repinings at the decree of Providence.

Alix had proved herself a little heroine.

She had taken upon herself the charge of the household, directing her two servants in their labours, had constituted herself chief nurse to Mrs. Polack, attending upon her night and day, and, in the midst of her onerous duties, never once relaxed her quiet self-control, or forgot the sweet and gentle patience that had come to replace her former gaiety and gladness.

A professional nurse had been engaged to assist Alix in nursing her friend, but the maiden spent most of her time by the bedside, and took her brief slumbers upon a couch in one corner of the room.

Her thoughts in those long hours of watching were not all of her dying protegee. She thought of Rellen, for whose presence his mother pined, in every waking moment, and prayed that he might come before it would be too late; she thought of her mysterious guardian with shuddering terror; and she thought of the fair-haired youth who had rescued her from probable drowning, and blushing whispered to herself a hope that they should meet again.

With her night and morning prayers for the health and comfort of Mrs. Polack, and the speedy return of Rellen, went up a petition for the happiness of Herbert Sayton, a name that she treasured in her inmost heart, as synonymous with all that was grand, noble and brave.

Thus a week had passed away.

It was strange how rapidly the invalid had failed since she had confessed her illness—

what frightful ravages in her personal appearance had all at once become apparent, and how suddenly her strength had given way after the disclosure of her malady.

As she lay in her bed one morning, her eyelashes drooping upon her wan, sunken cheeks, her white lips compressed, and her hands folded above her heart, which her insidious disease had already attacked, Alix bent over her with a loving gaze.

How white the invalid's hair had grown! The severe look had vanished from the thin face, which now expressed nothing except intense suffering and holy resignation.

Alix smoothed the faded hair under the thin white cap, arranged the pillows with a gentle hand; and then, with the tears welling up into her soft brown eyes, she turned to the open window, through which stole the sweet morning air.

The morning was lovely without, radiant with sunshine, flowers and birds, and the sick chamber had caught something of its brightness. Alix looked up at the blue sky, and was murmuring a prayer when a slight noise from the bed aroused her.

"Alix!" called the invalid, faintly.

"Yes, aunty," and the girl hastened to the bedside.

Mrs. Polack's eyes were open and had in them a strange, terrifying gaze, and a grey pallor had settled about her mouth.

"You need your medicine, Aunt Lettice!" said Alix, reaching out her hand for the opiate upon the table.

"No, love, no, I must not sleep now. I want to talk with you. Are we alone?"

"Yes, Aunt Lettice. The nurse is downstairs, and the doctor has not come!"

"It is well. Sit down by me, darling. I have much to say to you, and the time is short!"

Alix drew a chair to the bedside and seated herself, retaining Mrs. Polack's hand in her own.

"Alix," she said, in faint, tremulous tones, after a brief and thoughtful silence, "your life has been pleasant, has it not?"

"Yes, aunty, I have been very happy until my guardian came!"

"I had hoped that that happiness would be perpetual, my love. You deserve to be happy. You have made the sunshine of the Lodge since you came into it, and you have brightened my lonely life. I wanted to live that I might watch over and shield you always, but it may not be. You are so young that I cannot bear to leave you unprotected. I could have defended you from your mysterious guardian, but what can you do alone?"

"There is a kind and watchful Providence," said Alix, softly.

"Yes, there is, and I rely upon it. But I want you to have earthly friends to protect you too. You cannot live alone at the Lodge when I am gone. Hush, love, don't sob so. You ought to have a guardian who would defend you, if it were necessary, with his life. The rector is kind, but he is old and ill. There is but one other to whom I would trust you."

"Who is he?"

"My son Rellen," and the invalid's eyes glowed with a tender, motherly pride. "Oh, if I could but see him now! I fear, Alix, that I shall not live until he comes, and I want you to give him my blessing and last kiss. Here, let me press it on your lips now!"

Alix bent above her and received the fond caress which Rellen was not there to obtain for himself.

"Rellen has loved you always, Alix, from the day when he found you here on one of his visits from school. Do you remember the toys he used to bring you, the fairy stories with which he used to beguile your childish fancy? No brother was ever so tender and gentle as he. For years, Alix, I have dreamed of your becoming his wife. You are by nature so glad and joyous, so clinging and affectionate, and he is so gentle and mild; that you cannot fail to be happy together. Alix, won't you become his wife?"

The maiden drooped her head, and a soft, rosy flush stole up into her cheeks, as she replied in a whisper,—

"Rellen may not want me, aunty."

"Yes, he does, dear. It is right for me to betray his confidence now. The last time he was here he intended to ask you to become his wife, but circumstances prevented. If he had asked you, Alix, what would you have said?"

"I should have said yes," was the timid response.

A look of joy overspread the invalid's face, and she pressed the girl's hand, which seemed to grow colder in her clasp.

"My prayers are answered," she said. "You love Rellen, dear?"

The maiden hesitated, then replied,—

"I know he is grand and noble, aunty, and I admire him and look up to him. I—I love him as I might have loved an elder brother—"

"Only as a brother, Alix?"

"I hardly know, Aunt Lettice."

"It is natural, dear, that you should not fully understand your own heart yet. It is not for me to read it. When Rellen comes to you as a lover you will reveal your heart to him. But I may not live till then, Alix, and I can die happier if I know that your future and his are secured. When he asks you to be his wife what shall you say to him?"

The flush faded from the girl's cheeks, leaving them white as unstained marble, and a pained look was visible in her eyes, as she falteringly answered,—

"I hope he will not ask me, Aunt Lettice."

"And why not?"

"I scarcely understand myself, aunty. It seems to me that I don't love Rellen quite as a wife should. I know he is good, and I love him as a younger sister would, but a wife ought to worship her husband with a love far greater than I feel for Rellen."

"Alix, my love," said the dying woman, fixing her gaze upon her young charge, "when I spoke to you of Rellen, but a few days ago, you listened with blushes and confusion, and I was sure you loved him. Something must have occurred since that conversation to give you a clearer insight into your own heart. What was it?"

The maiden agitated, but did not reply.

The invalid regarded her for a moment in thoughtful quietness, and then said,—

"Is this change in your feelings the result of your adventure at Tanton Brook?"

Alix made no reply beyond a startled glance.

"Be frank with me, my love," she said, with yearning tenderness. "I am the only mother you have ever known, and I love you as I love Rellen. I know but little difference between my children. Have you thought of your brave young rescuer since?"

"Yes, aunty," was the response, in a timid whisper.

"Do you think you love this young gentleman, Alix?"

"Love him! Oh, aunty! Why, I saw him but once."

"True, my child, but the circumstances of that meeting were unusual. I have had a large experience, and have known many cases of real love at first sight. But, Alix, if you cherish the image of this youth in your heart you had better put it from you now, while you will receive the least pain. You may never see him again. And if you do, it will be better to relinquish his acquaintance."

"But why, Aunt Lettice?"

"Because he is a Viscount, and the brother-in-law of an Earl. His sister is Lady Roslyn, who was married but a few days since. This young Lord Sayton has just come of age, and is travelling for pleasure. The doctor casually informed me the other day that Lord Sayton had passed through the village on the day of your adventure, and I knew at once that he had been your rescuer."

"He is Lord Sayton, then!" mused Alix.

"Yes, my love, the descendant and representative of a noble and haughty race.

Suppose he were to fall in love with you—let us speak plainly, and simply suppose a case. He believes you to be Alix Erle, the niece of Mrs. Polack, a decayed schoolmistress, who is living upon her earnings. Would not that shock his sister, his brother-in-law, and his late guardian? Would not the world stare at his choice of a bride, when he might have wedded the noblest in the land?"

"But if he loved, aunty, he would not care for what people might say."

"Not for what people in general might say, but he would care for the opinion of his sister and her husband, and for the opinions of those whom he now regards as his friends. But I have presented the fairest side of the case," and the invalid looked affectionately upon the bended head of her darling. "You are not my niece, Alix. Your birth and position in life are unknown. At any moment this terrible guardian of yours might come upon you with a tale that would crush you to the very earth. Could the pride of this young Lord Sayton endure the shock of discovering that your origin is wrapped in a fearful mystery? Would he not indulge in fruitless speculations as to your parentage, and be disappointed if it some time came out that there was a stain upon your name?"

The countenance of Alix Erle grew pale and resolute as she listened to these remarks, and she answered,—

"Aunt Lettice, I had not hoped to marry Lord Sayton. I may never see him again. I have not the vanity to think that he will remember me, or wish ever to see my face again. I do not want to think of marriage at all, for I could never bear that any one should suffer one pang upon my account, or be ashamed of me."

"Alix," said the invalid, gently, pressing the cold hand of the young girl, "there is one who loves you, let your parentage be what it may. There is one who will shield you from the world, who will guard you from this enemy of yours and make you happy. It is Rellen. Oh, Alix! promise me to marry him. I cannot die in peace, if I think you will throw away his life and yours for a vain dream."

Alix's thoughts went back to her helpless childhood made happy by Mrs. Polack and her son. She thought of the joys with which they had surrounded her, the care and tenderness they had bestowed upon her, the respect with which they had always treated her.

Why should she hesitate to become the wife of Rellen? By marrying him she would make both mother and son happy, and in part requite their goodness to her.

Yet, in her soul, Alix Erle shrank from making the required promise.

Whether it was that some mysterious instinct unconsciously to herself warned her against it, or whether just as unconsciously she was experiencing an awakening love for the young Lord Sayton was not known even to herself.

"Oh, Alix," exclaimed Mrs. Polack, as the maiden did not answer, "have pity upon my son, as I had pity upon you."

That prayer decided the young girl.

"Aunt Lettice," she said, in clear tones, "it is right that the life that was, perhaps, saved by you, when you took me from the hands of my enemy, should be devoted to you and yours. You have made my life full of gladness and happiness, and I would care for you and love you as a daughter till my death if you could but live. If you are to be taken from me I will devote myself to Rellen?"

"You will marry him, then, my child?"

"If he desires it I will marry him!" declared Alix, solemnly, feeling that she was making a vow which might not be broken.

The invalid's face was irradiated with joy, and she breathed her thankfulness and gratitude in unmeasured terms.

"I shall then die happy," she said, "even if I may not see my son again; but I shall see him, Alix. I know, now, that I shall live to clasp your hand in his, and give you both my last blessing. I have no longer any fears

for your future, my love. Rellen will protect you!"

Her joyous smile gave way to an expression of agony, and she placed both her hands upon her breast, breathing gaspingly.

"You have talked too much, Aunt Lettice," said Alix, rising, and bending over her.

"Can't I do something for you?"

The invalid shook her head.

At this juncture the nurse entered the chamber.

Her round, red face grew grave as she noticed the agitated condition of her patient, and she uttered a remonstrance as she approached the bedside.

"This is not the course to take if you wish to keep strong till your son comes," she said.

"I had something I wished to say to Alix," answered the invalid, "I have not finished—"

"You are not well enough to finish now, Mrs. Polack. What will the doctor say if he finds you looking so worn out when he comes? You had better go to sleep. You will awaken as strong again as you are now."

She hesitated, knowing, perhaps, her own weakness better than another; but, desirous of keeping up until the arrival of her son, she yielded to the wishes of her nurse.

A potion was prepared, and administered to her, and she sank back upon her pillow.

"Sit by me, Alix," she said, feebly, feeling around for the hand of the young girl.

Alix resumed her seat, and took the invalid's hand.

"Alix," whispered the dying woman, "remember your promise!"

"I will remember!"

Mrs. Polack closed her eyes, but immediately reopened them; and beckoning the maiden closer to her, whispered,—

"Alix, this young lord may remember you and love you. He may be willing to overlook the mystery of your birth; but, if he should, you will never forget your promise?"

"Never, Aunt Lettice, never!"

The old lady smiled, and again closed her eyes, while Alix clasping her hand, kept close watch beside her.

The minutes wore on. The invalid sank to sleep; the nurse seated herself in an arm-chair by the window; and Alix gave herself up to reflection.

The revelation that the Hubert Sayton who had rescued her from possible drowning, and of whom she had since dreamed, as maidens will, was a Viscount, troubled her, and she assured herself that it was well she had promised to marry Rellen Polack, for the young nobleman would never think of her again.

Resolutely banishing all thoughts of him, she set herself to picturing a future with Mrs. Polack's son, and her heart warmed towards him as she remembered his gentleness and kindness.

Busied with her thoughts she did not notice that the hand she held was growing cold, or that the form of the old lady was becoming rigid.

She was aroused by the entrance of the doctor, who came to the bedside and looked upon the invalid. She saw him start, and feel the pulse of the hand she held, and then regard her with a look of commiseration.

"Aunt Lettice talked more than usual this morning, doctor," the said, thinking he desired an explanation of the invalid's unusual exhaustion. "She had some directions to give me. I think she will feel better when she awakens!"

"She does feel better, my child," said the doctor, gently, "and she has awakened—awakened in another world than ours!"

Alix uttered a low cry, and sprang up, looking upon the face that had always regarded her lovingly.

It was cold and passionless—rigid as the face of a marble statue.

The tears that had been so bravely repressed, lest they should grieve the invalid, now burst forth in a shower, and Alix sobbed in an agony of grief.



Yet not even now could Alix long give way to her tears.

For, a few minutes later, a cry of dismay came from the nurse, who had gone back to the window, and she exclaimed,—

"Mr. Polack is come! He is entering the house—"

"I must break the news to him!" said Alix, stifling her anguish. "She wanted me to tell him, and I must!"

With a wild inward prayer for strength and support the young girl kissed the still face she had loved, and turned to descend the stairs to the drawing-room, where Rellen Polack, unconscious of the blow awaiting him, had been shown.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"The heavy sigh,  
The tear in the half opening eye,  
The pallid cheek and brow, confess'd  
That grief was busy in his breast."

—Scott's *Rokeby*.

RELLEN POLACK had taken possession of his mother's favourite chair in the drawing-room near one of the windows, and was regarding curiously the desolate and neglected condition of the apartment, which seemed to have lost its homelike air, when Alix Erle, pale and sad, yet strangely composed, entered his presence.

He sprang up to greet her.

"Here I am back again, little Alix," he said, taking her trembling hand and pressing it closely, and bending towards her as though he longed to kiss her. "I walked up from the station, intending to surprise you all. Where is my mother?"

"Did you not receive my letter, Rellen?"

"I have received no letter. You know I have been to France, and I have not been near the post-office since my return. Is my mother ill? I noticed the doctor's gig at the gate, but I did not dream his visit could be intended for my mother!"

Alix gently conducted Rellen to the sofa, and sat beside him, saying, sadly,—

"I wrote to you a week ago, saying that Aunt Lettice was ill, Rellen. Oh! if I had only known your address in France! If I could only have telegraphed to you!"

The young man turned pale, and his lips quivered under his light moustache.

"Is my mother very ill, Rellen?" he asked.

"She has been very ill, Rellen!"

"She is better then now!" he exclaimed, in a tone of relief. "What has been the matter with her?"

Tears that would not be kept back welled up into Alix's soft brown eyes, and she said,—

"Oh, Rellen! for months Aunt Lettice has been a prey to a terrible and incurable disease, that has been slowly eating its way to her heart. She has borne her agony in silence and in secret, letting no one know of it but the doctor. She feared to distress you and me. She wanted to see us happy and joyous to the last. And now—"

Her voice broke down in a tempest of sobs.

"And now," said the young man, slowly, and in an awestruck tone. "And now she must die?"

Alix shook her head.

"Can't you understand, Rellen?" she asked, mournfully. "Aunt Lettice, cannot die, for she has entered upon the life eternal!"

"She is dead? My mother is dead?" demanded Rellen Polack, in quick, gasping tones.

"Yes, she died within the last hour. She fell asleep with my hand in hers, and has not awakened!"

The young man's face was as pale as that of the dead upstairs, and he looked stunned as he said,—

"This seems incredible, Alix. I cannot believe it. Why, she was well last week. She cannot be dead. I will see for myself!"

He arose abruptly, quitting the room, and

Alix heard his quick tread ascending the stairs to his mother's chamber.

The doctor and nurse were standing together by the bedside when he entered, but they stole noiselessly from the room, and the bereaved son was left alone.

During the hour that followed no one ventured to intrude upon him, but the nurse now and then came to the door, and finding it still shut went away again.

At length the door of the death-chamber opened, and Rellen Polack emerged, but little changed from his ordinary self, save that he had a strangely subdued air, and had lost something of the foppishness that usually distinguished him.

He went up to his own chamber, paid some attention to his toilette, for even then he could not forego the satisfaction to be derived from a faultless attire, and returned to the drawing-room, in search of Alix.

He found her there, lying upon the sofa, her black hair flowing over the crimson pillow, in a mass of confused curls, her scarlet lips just parted, and her dark clear cheeks stained with a delicate colouring.

She was asleep, with the sunlight streaming in upon her, glorifying her charming beauty.

Rellen Polack advanced and stood beside her, regarding her intently, with his hands folded across his breast.

Evens in his present grief, and he did grieve bitterly for the unexpected death of his only parent, he looked admiringly upon the childlike, innocent being who slept so peacefully there before him, and exulted in her loveliness.

He marked the clearness and purity of her brunette complexion, the steady glow of her cheeks and lips, the long, curling black lashes that guarded her shut eyes, the graceful abandon of her attitude, and, above all, the patient mournfulness of her countenance even in sleep.

"Poor little Alix," he murmured, involuntarily, reaching out his hand, and closing the shutters that the sun might no longer play upon her face. "She looks completely exhausted. I daresay that she has scarcely closed her eyes for a week. I should like the room to look homelike when she awakens."

He crossed the floor, opened another window, and emptied upon the ground without the withered contents of the flower-vases, which had been undisturbed for a week.

And then he stepped out into the garden and cut long sprays of red and pink roses, hyacinths, and pansies, brought them in and arranged them tastefully in every receptacle for the purpose that the drawing-room contained.

The task seemed to afford him genuine satisfaction and pleasure.

It was singular that this man of mystery, who had listened unmoved to the prayers of the stately and lovely Countess of Roalyn, who had exulted in the hold he had obtained over the bride of the noble Earl, should delight in pleasing the eyes of a childlike girl like Alix, and in giving her heart a single throb of joy.

But the ruling passion of his evil heart was his love for Alix Erle—a love as pure, true, and steadfast as even the good can feel. A single hair from her black curls was more precious in his sight than all his costly jewels, and he treasured up her chance words and smiles as something more precious than gold.

When he had finished his self-imposed task, he noiselessly quitted the drawing-room.

In the corridor he encountered the cook, an immensely large woman, whose red face was overcast with the general gloom, and who stepped softly, as if she feared to awaken the silent sleeper upstairs.

"I was just going in search of you," exclaimed the young man.

"It's a sad coming home for you, Master Rellen," returned the woman, putting her apron to her eyes, "but people must eat, and your breakfast is almost ready. If Miss Alix would eat with you 'twould do her good, for

she hasn't eaten enough to keep a bird alive for a whole week."

"Miss Alix is asleep now, but she will share my breakfast. Lay the table for two in the library. I will ring when I want it served."

The cook assented, and retreated to her dominions, while her master returned to the drawing-room, seated himself near the sleeping maiden, and waited for her to awaken.

It was at first pleasant to watch her gentle slumbers, but thoughts of the one who had cherished her as a daughter came involuntarily to his mind, and a look of sadness gathered in his light blue eyes—a sadness that almost, if not quite, approached the verge of fearfulness.

But if Rellen Polack shed any tears to the memory of his mother it must have been during the hour which he had spent in her death-chamber, for no one was ever permitted to witness such a tribute of grief and affection from him.

Pushing his chair back from the light, it came in contact with a book which lay upon the edge of the console-table, and the volume fell to the floor.

The noise thus made aroused Alix from her slumbers.

She had accustomed herself to awaken at the slightest sound, and now started, and half-opened her eyes, exclaiming unconsciously,—

"I am coming, aunty, dear—"

Rellen caught his breath, gaspingly.

The sound served to awaken Alix thoroughly; she arose to a sitting posture, and looked at the young man with mingled surprise and confusion.

"I did not mean to go to sleep, Rellen," she said, "but I was very tired—"

"Make no apologies, Alix!" he exclaimed.

"You have exhausted yourself, and should spend the day in your bed!"

"Have you had your breakfast, Rellen? I ordered it directly after you came."

"We will have it now. And after breakfast we will have a long talk. I have so many questions to ask you, so much to say."

He touched the bell, as a signal to the cook, and Alix glanced around the room, warned by the fragrance of the freshly-gathered flowers.

She knew from whom had come this delicate attention, and gave him an affectionate, grateful look that thanked him better than words could have done.

"Come, Alix," he said, offering her his arm. "Breakfast is ready."

The maiden was about to plead her want of appetite and to beg to be excused; but, remembering how desolate the table would be without any of the home-faces, she placed her hand in his, and was conducted across the hall to the room dignified with the title of library.

It was a small square room, with a western aspect, that had served as a repository for books in the days when Anerley Lodge had been noted as a school for young ladies. It was neatly fitted up, with a cool-looking green carpet, and three or four mahogany bookcases, each surmounted by a plaster bust, half-veiled with thin gauze.

The breakfast-table was placed in the centre of this little room, and presented an inviting appearance with its display of china, crystal, and silver, as well as with the delicately-broiled birds laid upon toast, and the painted china teapot, fragrant with the mild and pleasant beverage.

The master of the Lodge handed Alix to her seat and took his own opposite. He waited upon her assiduously, and the maiden forced herself to eat, but the meal progressed mostly in silence.

Both felt relieved when the repast was finished, and they returned to the drawing-room.

"Now, Alix," said the young man, leading her to the sofa, and seating himself beside her, detaining her hand, "tell me about my mother's illness. Tell me everything that has happened at the Lodge since I went away."

Alix proceeded to obey. She related how she had visited Tenton Fall the morning

after he had left home, how she had rescued the miller's child, and been in turn rescued; but she said little of her rescuer, who Rellen very naturally took for granted was a mill-operative or farm-labourer. She told of seeing the doctor's gig at the gate on her return, of being alarmed, and then detailed the old lady's confession of a mortal illness.

"After she told me of her disease, Rellen, she wanted to be helped to bed, which she did not leave afterwards," added Alix, striving to repress her tears. "She slept most of the time, for her sufferings increased with every moment, and it was necessary to give her opiates. She spoke of you in every waking interval, and this morning she said she thought she should live till your return!"

"My poor mother!" said Rellen, with a tremulous utterance. "If I had but suspected her danger I would have come at once! To think that I was so near her, and yet did not once imagine that she needed me!"

"So near, Rellen? Why, were you not in France?"

"Yes, but I returned two days since. Business detained me in London, but, if I had only known the truth nothing could have kept me from home. Did my mother leave no message for me?"

"Yes, Rellen. She left you her blessing, her best love, and this!" and Alix bent forward and pressed her sweet lips to those of the evil-hearted man beside her. "I promised to give you her last kiss!"

There was a brief silence, and then the young man said,—

"Did she say nothing about me in her last hours, Alix? Tell me all she said to you this morning!"

A bright, vivid colour burned more steadily than before on the girl's cheeks, and she drooped her gaze in unaliently embarrassment.

Rellen instantly comprehended its cause. He knew that his mother had longed for his marriage with Alix, and he did not doubt but that she had in her last hours imparted her hopes to the young girl.

"Never mind what she said now, dear," he said, earnestly. "You shall tell me some other time, if you will, for every word uttered by my mother in her last hours has a great value for me. Let us talk of ourselves now."

There was something so significant in his tones that Alix instinctively shrank from him, with an involuntary thought of Hubert Sayton, but Rellen continued to hold one of her hands closely, while he wound his unoccupied arm about her slender waist, drawing her nearer to him.

"Is my little sister afraid of me?" he asked reproachfully.

"Oh, no, no, Rellen!"

"Have you realised, Alix, how lonely you will be now at the Lodge? I shall be compelled to spend much of my time in town, and the servants will be neither protectors nor companions for you."

"I know it, Rellen," was the mournful response.

"You are but a child in many respects, Alix, although you are eighteen. You are learned in book knowledge, a genuine artist, a fine musician, and an excellent linguist, but what do you know of mankind, you unsuspicious, little dove? You believe every one to be as good, true and honest as the people you have always known. Would that I could guard you from an awakening to the truth! You are liable, if left unguarded, to be seized at any moment by your legal guardian, and carried away from all who know and love you. Will you not give me the legal power to protect you?"

Alix looked up wonderingly, and he continued, with something of passion in his smooth tones,—

"Alix, I have loved you ever since you came to the Lodge, a delicate, quaint little being, enshrouded by mystery. You clung to me when you first saw me. You used to

weep after our partings, and dance with joy at my return. Your brown eyes have more or less haunted me through life, but not until recently did I conceive the hope of making you my very own, my little wife. Will you give yourself to me, Alix? Will you marry me?"

He listened eagerly for a response.

There was a little hesitation, and the maiden said,—

"Rellen, I know that you have always had the idea that I should prove of good birth, for Aunt Lettice told me as much one day during her illness. But suppose my origin were something to be ashamed of and blush for—"

"It would not affect my love for you in the least! It is true that I believe your origin will prove to be highly honourable, if ever known at all, but if I know it to be contrary I should honour and revere you just as I do now. It is yourself I love Alix. Tell me that you will become my wife!"

Again Alix hesitated, but for a moment.

During that brief moment she thought of Hubert Sayton, of his promise to see her again, and she told herself that a Viscount could have nothing in common with a nameless girl, and that she was perhaps betrothed to one of his own rank in life.

Then, with a faint sigh, an unobtrusively brushed her pleasant, baseless dream, she said, aloud,—

"Rellen, it is but a poor and small return for all your kindness to promise to become your wife. But if you want me, I will marry you!"

"My darling!" he said, looking tenderly into her upturned face. "Do you love me?"

He looked so gentle and good, he was so affectionate, and seemed such an incarnation of manliness and integrity, that Alix almost persuaded herself that her sisterly love for him was the lasting love of her life, and she replied, blushing,—

"How can I help loving you, dear Rellen?"

Entraptured by her naive confession, the young man caught her to his breast, and pressed his lips upon her brow.

"We are betrothed now," he said.

"Yes," responded Alix, with a tender gravity, "we are betrothed. And Aunt Lettice is pleased!"

"She is indeed, if she can only know that you are my promised wife. But I do not believe that she can see us now," declared Rellen, to whom the idea that the secrets of his life might now be revealed to the eyes of his dead parent was inexpressibly repugnant. "But here is something, dearest, which I have provided against the present contingency."

He drew from his pocket a tiny white velvet box, which he opened, displaying to her gaze a magnificent diamond solitaire, exquisitely set.

He drew it from its resting-place and placed it upon her finger, which it fitted exactly.

"That is our engagement ring, Alix," he said, delighted with her admiration of the gem. "You must never remove it from your finger until at least you wear the plain gold one I am going to give you."

"It is splendid, Rellen!" declared Alix. "I shall never remove it until you give me leave to do so. But isn't it too costly for me? Is speculating such a profitable business that you can afford such things as this?"

A strange look flitted over Rellen Pofsek's face, but it vanished before he replied,—

"Yes, little Alix, speculating is very profitable, and I can well afford a princely jewel as a gift to my future wife."

Alix was satisfied at this response, and examined the trinket with natural curiosity and admiration, moving her small white hand so that the gem flashed and sparkled, sending forth with every movement a thousand prismatic rays.

"When you become my wife, Alix," said her betrothed, "I shall make your life a fairy dream. I shall delight to bestow upon you costly jewels. I will surround you with

luxuries; servants shall wait to do your slightest bidding, and your most devoted slave shall be myself."

"Rellen, I would not care to lead such a life," said the maiden, gravely. "Existence should not be wasted. I should desire to lead an earnest life, doing good to others, making others better and happier for having known me. If I can make you happy, Rellen, or if I can assist you in doing good, it is all I shall ask."

"My little Paritan," said her lover, fondly, yet with a shadow of regret upon his brow. "I would not change you one whit, little Alix, but I wish I could have been under your influence earlier. I should have been a better man to-day."

Alix looked incredulous, deeming his words to be the language of undue familiarity. She thought him noble beyond his fellows, and admired him the more for his self-depreciation.

"But, after all," he continued, in a tone expressive of self-satisfaction, "it is as well as it is. I am better fitted to cope with the world than I should have been had I taken another course, and I am quite as good as the majority of mankind. As ten good men would have saved Sodom, so the angel who is going to become my wife will save me. I can hardly believe, little Alix, that you have promised to become my wife. Tell me when shall we be married?"

Alix looked shocked.

"Oh, Rellen," she said, "is it not too soon to think of that? Dear Renny is not yet married!"

"I know all you would urge, love," he responded, seriously, as her tears burst forth. "Our hearts are both filled with mourning, and this would not seem a time to talk of weddings, but my mother would have wished the matter settled. I must know when I can claim you, and take you under my protection."

"Forgive me, Rellen, you are right. Let it be a year hence—"

"A year? An age! Why, in that time your guardian could spirit you to the ends of the earth. No, Alix, this is no time for prudery or useless ceremony. I know that you are young, and that a few weeks should be given to the conquering of our grief for the loss of our best friend. I am willing to wait six months."

In speaking elsewhere of Rellen Pofsek as the Count Lechelle, we have mentioned that he possessed an indomitable will veiled under the mildest, softest manners, and Alix Eric was now conscious that, gently as her suitor spoke, it would be useless to plead for an extension of the period of her freedom.

"I will be ready at the end of six months, Rellen," she said.

"And where will that six months be spent, dearest?"

"Why, at the Lodge, of course. I have nowhere else to go. The rector is old, and his wife is an invalid, as well as himself. The doctor has a large family of his own, and I am not intimate enough with anyone else to be asked to become a member of the family. Can't I stay here, Rellen?"

"I don't see much objection," he said, thoughtfully. "The cook and Michael can remain, and you can engage some old lady to stay with you as duenna. Then I shall be at home often to visit you. I will give you my town address, so that you can telegraph if anything should occur to make my presence desirable here. You would do so, of course, if that mysterious guardian of yours should come back here. But I hardly think he will. He appeared to be afraid of recognition, and as you did not recognise him he'll be likely to let you alone."

While he was speaking, he drew a card from his pocket, and wrote down his London address.

"You must keep this in your pocket-book, Alix, and always have your pocket-book on your person. For the next few months you are to be in a measure your own mistress, and



will need to exercise a great deal of caution. Where is your purse?"

Alix drew from her pocket a small Russia leather purse, bound with silver, and Rellen put into it the card bearing his address, and a small bundle of folded bank-notes.

He then clasped it, and she replaced it in her pocket.

"It is soon to think of all these things, Alix," he said; "but I want to say that I will arrange about the housekeeping with the cook, who will discharge the duties of both offices, while you will be mistress. I shall remain with you a week, and by the end of that time matters can be placed upon a permanent footing. And now to return to our talk about jewels. (Will you bring me the bracelet I gave you a week or so ago? I want to have another made exactly like it. They are worn so much in pairs now!)

"I will go and get it, Rellen," said the maiden, too heartsore to care at all for the costly ornament, or to wonder at her lover's request for it.

She arose, and went up to her own room, her tears flowing freely as she passed the open door of the death chamber, and saw the nurse engaged working upon some ghostly garment, and her tears deepened into sobs when she reached her own room.

She knelt down by her couch, remaining on her knees until she became once more self-composed, and then she sought the star bracelet, the absence of which was causing Lady Roslyn so much uneasiness, and return with it to her suite.

He took it and put it in his pocket, with a look of intense satisfaction, wondering, as he did so, if his unexpected delay in returning it to her would cause the youthful Countess any uneasiness or trouble.

"You look weary, my love!" he said, caressing her head as his mother had been wont to do, and then gently drawing it to his shoulder. "This is a great trouble to come upon you. I would gladly bear it for myself and you, for men have power to fling off their troubles as women cannot do. Did I tell you that I am going to be a very exacting lover, dearest, and shall expect a letter from you every day during my absence? You shall tell me of your every-day pursuits, of your little joys and trials, and I shall write to you as frequently!"

Alix yielded assent to his demand, and he was about to say something further, when the sound of wheels in front of the house caused them both to look out of the window.

"It is the rector and his wife!" exclaimed Alix. "They are coming in!"

Rellen made a grimace at this information which his betrothed did not see, and a minute later the good rector and his lady were ushered into the drawing room.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Mine eyes

Were not in fault, for she was beautiful;  
Mine ears that heard her flattery, nor mine heart,  
That thought her like her seeming; it had been  
vicious  
To have mistrusted her.

—Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*.

We cannot depict the anxiety with which the young Countess of Roslyn awaited the return of Lechelle with the star bracelet. Every evening she raised to her boudoir at an early hour in the hope of discovering the ornament upon her table, and each disappointment became more unendurable than the last. She tortured herself with thoughts that her enemy wished to bring her to the verge of despair, and that fancied object was at times almost accomplished.

Nearly every day the Earl renewed his suggestion that a detective should be sent for, to solve the mystery of the midnight robbery, and he was deterred from acting upon it only by the strenuous objections of his bride, who nervously declared that she was sure she should find it in a day or two.

The supposed robber himself was scarcely mentioned by either the husband or wife, but Lord Roslyn's thoughts were busy concerning him. He made up his mind that the owner of that delicately tinted, faintly-scented glove he had found in his bride's boudoir was no ordinary thief, but he banished resolutely all derogatory reflections upon Lady Roslyn. He did indeed wonder at times that nothing beside the bracelet in question had disappeared from her jewel-casket, and remembrances of her singular manner on the occasion of his informing her of her strange visitant would occasionally obtrude themselves upon his mind, but he invariably became angry with himself for his suspicions.

And yet he was impelled to wander about the lawn night after night after her retirement to her apartments, to watch her windows, and the tree shading them. As this proceeding was for a whole week without result, he relinquished it, and thereafter shut himself up in his study, to contemplate the glove he had found, or to think of the peerless beauty he had won, and yet who seemed farther away from him now than before their marriage.

He had grown to love her with an absorbing passion, to love even the glitter of her hair, the expression of her grey eyes, the exquisite loveliness of her cold, proud face, and the queenly grace of her movements. He had at times an absolute longing to hear her voice addressing him in fond, wifely tones, and to see her smile upon him; but she longed remained ungratified, and he continually upbraided himself for the strange compact he had proposed to her on their bridal night, and to which she had so quietly, yet gladly, acceded.

If he had only begun differently was now his vain wish.

But his own words had made a gulf between them that could not be bridged over.

His vain fancy for Mrs. Adrian had quite died out, and the astute widow now fully understood that her hopes were futile, and, resolving to make a graceful retreat, was about to return to Vienna. Vayle Malvern had watched the growing love of the Earl for his young wife, and had informed the widow of it, telling her that a protracted stay near the Manor was on her part worse than useless.

But Malvern had not relinquished his schemes. He had only dropped Mrs. Adrian out of them. The sight of the midnight visitor to the Countess had inspired him with new hopes and plans, and he had taken renewed courage as to his final success. He was even glad that the Earl was in love with his bride, for it would give him an opportunity to work upon his jealous passions, and to inspire him with a hatred of womankind that would be an effectual bar to a second marriage.

On the last evening of Mrs. Adrian's stay at her residence, Malvern went over to call upon her and remained until a late hour. Lady Roslyn retired to her boudoir before his return, and the Earl retreated to his study to indulge in his feelings of gloom and sadness.

The boudoir was brilliantly lighted, as usual, and the Countess threw herself in a half-reclining position upon a silken couch in one corner, and gave up her mind to painful thoughts.

She knew that Mrs. Adrian intended to take her departure on the morrow, for the subject had been casually discussed at dinner, and had indeed been made known to her by the widow on the previous day. Before leaving the mansion that evening Malvern had, in the temporary absence of the Earl, informed her that Lord Roslyn and Mrs. Adrian had come to the conclusion that they had better part, since for each to look upon the face of the other and realise the barrier between them was anguish too painful to be borne.

The Countess had received this communication with haughty disdain, but the arrow had pierced her heart. She had exerted herself to appear cool and unconcerned throughout the evening, but she was glad to be alone now, that she might lay aside her mask of calmness,

and give vent to the emotions that surged in her heart.

The visit of Mrs. Adrian had not been without effect. Too much absorbed in her own life to watch that of another intently, Lady Roslyn believed that her husband ardently loved the handsome widow, and chafed at the bonds that bound him to his wife. She believed the scene by the Singing Water to be an involuntary expression of their affection for each other, and the gloom of the Earl was construed into grief at his inability to make Mrs. Adrian the sharer of his destiny. She had noticed the Earl's occasional involuntary tenderness towards herself, but she believed it assumed for the purpose of blinding her to the actual state of affairs.

"If I were dead they would marry," she said, without bitterness, as she sat there in the flood of mellow light, her beauty transfused with a tender glow of sadness. "The Earl is in his study, giving way to his grief at Mrs. Adrian's intended departure on the morrow, and she—I do not believe her to be worthy of him, but they would have been happy together. She is probably as worthy of him as I am," she added, the colour flooding in and out of her pure cheeks. "I would give anything to be free again!"

She bowed her head on her hand, and tears brimmed over in her lovely eyes.

"Oh, if Alaric would but come to-night!" she murmured. "It is more than a week since he promised to bring back that bracelet, and every day's delay is full of danger for me. What if Eustace should send for a detective, and he should discover that I have a secret, and—"

She sprang up with nervous abruptness, opened her window, and stepped out upon the balcony.

The night was intensely dark, and the wind sighed softly among the trees, and swept up from the gardens, bringing with it the fragrant smell of flowers.

She could just distinguish the forms of the trees near the mansion, and the branches that swayed to and fro near the balcony, but not a sign of humanity was distinguishable.

She clasped her hands with a wild, despairing movement, and looked up at the murky sky with a frenzied prayerfulness, whispering,—

"Oh, why does he not come?"

There was a faint movement amidst the foliage of the trees, then a quick rustling of leaves, and a sound as of someone creeping stealthily; then a figure sprang lightly from the branch upon the balcony, and the soft voice of Count Lechelle said,—

"Your adjuration has brought me, my tragedy queen! I was endeavouring to find out if you were alone, when you so kindly enlightened me. Let us enter."

He pushed open the window, and glided swiftly into the boudoir.

Her ladyship followed, closed the aperture, and drew the curtains.

While she performed this office her visitor locked the doors leading into the corridor and bed-chamber; and when she had finished he said,—

"Our meeting cannot be conducted with too much secrecy, Adine. I do not wish to alarm you, but the truth is there was a spy watching my movements the other evening. It was Vayle Malvern; and I warn you to beware of him."

The Countess looked incredulous.

"This evening I took the precaution to make a thorough search of the lawn, and I know that no one is lurking about. It is my policy to screen you from trouble, Adine, for I expect a great deal from you."

The young bride made a gesture of impatience, and exclaimed,—

"Did you bring the bracelet, Alaric? Do not mock me with other things when I am eager to know the worst."

"There is no 'worst' in this case," he responded, lightly. "My friend was pro-

pitiated with the sum you sent him, and gave up the jewel. There it is!"

He took from his pocket a square paper box, which the Countess caught eagerly from his hand and opened.

It contained the star bracelet.

Lady Roslyn snatched it up from its bed of pink cotton, examined it narrowly to assure herself that it was her veritable ornament, and again more closely to see that its gems had not been abstracted and ingeniously replaced with clever imitations in paste; and then, with a sigh of relief that was almost a sob, she clasped the recovered trinket upon her arm.

Count Lechelle watched her curiously, yet with apparent unconcern.

"Its absence has caused your ladyship anxiety?" he said.

"You knew it would!" she answered, with vehemence. "You knew that you were driving me to the very edge of endurance, and yet you cruelly stayed away for more than a week—"

"Don't speak so loud, Adine," he interrupted, a shade gathering upon his forehead. "Since there was no spy upon you out-of-doors there may be one within. The Earl himself may be listening at yonder door!"

"Lord Roslyn is no eavesdropper!" declared the young wife, proudly.

"Possibly not, but a man will descend to a great deal if he fancies the honour of his name is at stake. Of course, Vayle Malvern told his relative that he saw a man descend from your room, but he did not see my face. I took good care of that. The Earl has probably indulged in various speculations upon the subject, but he must have concluded that I was a thief!" and he laughed lightly.

"He did so conclude, and wanted to send to town for a detective. He saw you himself that evening, as well as Malvern, and came up and questioned me, but I told him that I had seen no thief. Then he looked to see if any of my jewels were gone, and missed this bracelet. He thinks it was stolen, and I do not know how I shall account to him for its repossession! Oh, if you had only come before! It might then have been supposed that I had mislaid it!"

"But I could not come before, my Lady Adine," returned Lechelle, the shadow returning to his brow. "I intended to come to you, but the death of a near relative detained me elsewhere—"

"The death of a relative. Whose death, Alaric? You know I do not know even your real name, and am not certain of your nationality."

"You know more of me than most people know," he answered. "As to this death, I prefer not to speak of it."

Lady Roslyn glanced at his foppish attire, which was without a sign of mourning, at the jewels on his fingers, and the dainty-coloured tie at his throat, and said,—

"Always surrounded by mystery, Alaric! You lead two lives at once, and those who know you in one character do not suspect your identity with the other!"

"If you had said several characters, instead of two, you would have approached the truth more nearly," said Lechelle, carelessly. "I have a taste for mystery, and shall delight in resuming the character of the Count Lechelle, which I once bore with such success. By the way, Adine, have you thought farther of my demand to be reintroduced into fashionable society?"

"I have, but I do not see how I can accomplish it. We shall remain at Roslyn Manor until next winter. I have no wish for gaieties at present," and the bride spoke wearily.

"Perhaps I shall decide to wait until winter, Adine, before I dazzle society with my brilliancy," he said, thoughtfully. "Six months hence a very desirable even will happen, and—perhaps, 'twould be as well to wait. My plans are in a sort of chaos at present, in consequence of the death to which I alluded. I did intend to insist upon being invited as a guest to the Manor, but six months will pass

away quickly enough, and at the end of that time I shall have amassed enough of the indispensable to permit me to assume a style suitable to my countship. I think I will wait!"

The young Countess looked relieved, thankful that the evil day was deferred for even a few moments.

She did not venture to inquire what the "desirable event" might be, although she noticed a strangely soft expression in the blue eyes of the pretended Count, and a sudden flush upon his cheek, nor did he seek to enlighten her.

For a few moments both sat in silence, and when Lechelle looked up, intending to speak, he noticed how pale and sad was the lovely oval face of the young bride, and that her eyes were full of unshed tears.

"Weeping, Adine!" he exclaimed, with a mocking smile. "Why, you ought to be the happiest being in the world. You are wealthy, a Countess, have a young and handsome husband, a beautiful home, admirers—what more can you ask?"

"Peace!" she responded, recklessly. "I want peace of heart, and none of these things can bring them. I wish I had not married. I should not have done so but that I received a false report of your death—"

"I sent it you myself!"

"And I thought the past was all dead and buried! I had no suspicion that my secret could ever be brought up against me—that there existed a human being to whom it was known! I committed a fatal error, and every hour brings with it a separate punishment."

"You are too sensitive, my dear Countess," expostulated Lechelle, half earnestly.

"Too sensitive! When I know that I am living a falsehood! When I know that I am standing upon a mine to which a match may be applied at any moment! Too sensitive, when I know that my ruin will involve that of others—will bring contumely upon a noble house, and overwhelm its head with misery!"

As she spoke, she stood up before him, with uplifted arm, her face full of the inspiration of true feeling, her eyes flashing like the diamonds encircling her arm, and her attitude instinct with proud indignation.

Lechelle gazed upon her admiringly, scarcely hearing her words, his æsthetic tastes gratified to the full by her glorious beauty.

"A Pythoness!" he exclaimed. "An inspired Pythoness! It was a blind fate that gave you the coronet of a Countess, Adine Roslyn. You should have been, what I called you before, a tragedy queen. What a furor you would have created!"

The arm of the Lady of Roslyn fell to her side, the glow left her face, and, pale and sad, she sank back into her seat.

"All may yet be well, my dear Countess," he said, more seriously, his soft tones sounding in her ears like the hiss of a serpent. "You have but to meet my demands, and you are safe. I must make you my stepping-stone to a position, but I shall take care that you are not compromised by me. I think I shall make good my claim to the title of the Count Lechelle. There are Italian states where one can purchase a patent of nobility at moderate price."

The Countess shivered, but did not speak.

Her heart was too heavy to be cheered by a prospect of ultimate release from her bitter thralldom, and when her sinister visitor went on to depict what he should require of her, and at what period of his future career he would release her from her subjection to him, she only saw before her an endless succession of hopeless days and sleepless nights.

Conscious that he was without power to cheer her, and rather chagrined that it was so, Lechelle at last signified his intention of departing.

"I cannot tell when you may expect me again, Adine," he said, arising. "I shall doubtless come at a moment when you expect

me least. I will see if the coast is clear for my departure!"

He went towards the window, which he drew slightly open, and peered out into the darkness, listening acutely.

"I must wait a few minutes," he soon said. "A horseman is coming up the avenue, and would see me leave your room—the light is so strong within, and the darkness so great without."

"It is Mr. Malvern, who has been to call upon a neighbour. I would not for the world have him see you."

At that moment there was a low knock upon the door opening into the corridor, and then the knob was vainly turned.

"Adine," said the voice of the Earl, in low tones. "May I enter?"

The Countess stood as if paralysed, not making a movement towards the door, and even the sinister Lechelle seemed bereft of his self-possession on thus finding himself hemmed in.

## CHAPTER XIX.

Better confide, and be deceived,

A thousand times, by treacherous foes,  
Than once accuse the innocent,  
Or let suspicion mar repose.

—Mrs. Osgood.

THE self-possession of the pretended Count Lechelle had deserted him but for a moment. By the time the Earl's knock upon the door of the boudoir had been repeated, he was himself again, as cool, quiet, and careless as ever.

"Courage, Adine!" he whispered to the alarmed Countess, who still stood like a marble statue.

"All is lost!" murmured the young bride, his words falling upon deafened ears.

"All is not lost. Regain your self-possession. Your whole destiny depends upon your conduct at this moment. That door yonder opens into your bed-chamber?"

"Yes, but my maid may be busy in there!"

Count Lechelle did not look at all disturbed by this announcement.

His fertile brain had suggested an excellent expedient which would favour his escape, and he now acted upon it.

He listened a moment to the sound of horses' hoofs, as Malvern rode up the avenue towards the mansion, and then he mounted lightly upon the marble-topped centre-table, and quickly turned off the lights, leaving the room in perfect darkness.

He leaped down as lightly as he had mounted, and said,—

"Courage, Adine. Unlock the door. *Adieu!*"

While speaking he glided across the floor, opened the window sufficiently to give egress to his slender figure, and stood upon the balcony.

Favoured by the intense darkness he sprang into the tree, slid to the ground, and sauntered away in the darkness, his movements entirely unsuspected by Malvern, between whom and Lady Roslyn's window a tree had momentarily intervened.

Had his movements been but a little slower detection would have been inevitable, for the next moment Malvern discovered that the Countess's light had been suddenly extinguished, and he involuntarily checked his horse, while he puzzled himself for a solution to the singular phenomenon, for the hour was too early for her ladyship to think of retiring.

With a glimmering of the truth he gave rein to his steed, and rode up under the windows of the boudoir, but he saw no sign of the departed visitant.

Assured that Lechelle had escaped, and that she was safe, the blood bounded in the veins of the Countess, and she felt a renewal of hope and energy.

As her husband's knock sounded for the third time, and more loudly, as if the Earl were becoming alarmed at her continued



silence, she crossed the room, turned the key in the lock, and opened the door.

Lord Roslyn, revealed by the light that glowed in the corridor, stood before her.

"In the dark, Adine?" he said, endeavouring to look at her face, as she shrank back into the gloom. "Are you ill?"

"No," she answered, striving to command her voice.

There must have been something unusual in her manner or tone, for again he strove to regard her countenance.

"Then this gloom is not good for you," he said, quietly. "Permit me to light your lamps!"

He produced from his pocket a cigar-case, took from it a tiny waxen match, ignited it, and applied himself to the task of lighting each of the six lamps that ornamented the branches of the great chandelier.

The result was a flood of mellow radiance that lighted up every corner of the room, and beamed brightest upon the face and figure of the Countess, who shaded her eyes from the sudden glare.

Lord Roslyn's first act was to cast a rapid yet comprehensive glance around the room.

He then looked at the half-opened window.

"All alone, Adine?" he asked. "I thought I heard voices when I first knocked. Has not Lucette been with you?"

The young Countess noticed that he was deathly pale, and that his countenance was stern and his lips quite white as he asked the question.

By this time she had recovered her self-possession, and a feeling that was almost one of desperation had entered her heart.

"No," she answered, "Lucette has not been with me!"

"And you have been entirely alone?" persisted the Earl, not at all satisfied by her response.

"No one can be entirely alone when they have thoughts for company," she said, evasively.

"Pardon me, Adine, but you have not answered my question."

The Countess withdrew her hand from her eyes, and drew up her slight, queenly figure with an indignation and haughtiness that were not assumed, and exclaimed,—

"You forget, my lord, that I am Lady Roslyn. I, however, never forget the fact for a single moment, nor that I am a Bayton!"

The Earl seemed about to reply, then hesitated, and looked steadfastly at her with a gaze at once stern and sorrowing.

He did not doubt her word that she ever kept in mind her rank, and was careful to do nothing to cloud its brightness, but he felt that there was a deep and tangible mystery about her, and he would have given his right hand to have been able to fathom it.

He was convinced that he had heard the murmur of voices, as he stood knocking at the door, and her evasive reply had only confirmed his conviction; yet how could he suspect any wrong of that noble-looking woman, with her crown of shimmering golden hair, with her large, luminous eyes, and pure, lovely face?

He looked at her with a straightforward intentness, longing for the power to read her inscrutable heart, and she looked back at him unfalteringly, with but the faintest perceptible quivering of her crimson lips, and a somewhat defiant expression in her dark grey eyes.

"Excuse me, Adine," he said, "if I urge this question. I beg you will not misconstrue my motives. You know that I have the deepest reverence for your purity, and that I believe you to be as innocent as an angel. It is not that I am concerned upon your account that I speak, for I know that you have too great a regard for the laws of society to admit a visitor to your room at this hour. But that man who came here on your bridal night, and whom Vayle saw, and who was seen a week ago by both Vayle and myself to descend from your window—the man who stole your star bracelet—that man might have been tempted

by the darkness of your boudoir to enter and commit further depredations. You looked so pale when I came in that the thought entered my mind that he might have come here to-night, found you sleeping, perhaps, and commenced a robbery which you awakened in time to interrupt!"

"You are fanciful, Eustace, in your explanation of a slight paleness. I am more often pale than flushed, you know. My thoughts might not have been very agreeable, and I dare say I spoke aloud. I frequently do so when my thoughts are disturbed."

Lord Roslyn was silenced, but his conviction that he had heard voices in the boudoir as in conversation was not shaken.

He endeavoured to fling off the disagreeable impression created by her ladyship's evasion of his questioning, stepped forward, closed and fastened the window, and drew the curtains together.

As he did so, Vayle Malvern, who until now had lingered under the windows, rode up to the great porch of the mansion.

Quitting the window, the Earl returned to his bride with a sad look on his face, and said,—

"Is my presence undesirable in your room, Adine?"

"Not at all, Eustace," she answered, assuming a smile. "I should like to hear you read."

"Not to-night. I don't feel in the humour for reading to-night, if you will excuse me from the task. Let us converse, Adine. Our honeymoon is half spent, and we do not seem to be nearly so well acquainted with each other as before our marriage."

He did not suspect the existence of the fearful secret that had come between them like a gigantic and impassable barrier.

The young Countess sank gracefully into her armchair, the Earl seating himself near her, and replied, carelessly,—

"I think you are right, Eustace. We are not so well acquainted with each other. Or, it may be we have learned so much of each other that we now know how much remains to be learned. I suppose that neither you nor I can boast of a transparent character. We do not wear our hearts on our sleeves 'for daws to peck at.'"

"No, we do not!" declared the Earl, with a sigh. "It seems to me, Adine," he added, with a passionate quiver running through his tones, "that you and I are as far asunder as the poles!"

"United, yet divided. Bound together in marriage, when either of us would give every farthing we own if we could place ourselves where we stood three weeks ago!" responded the Countess, her heart in her voice, and her face instinct with earnestness. "Few marriages have been more brilliant than ours; few have seemed to begin with a brighter sun of prosperity and happiness; and in few indeed has that sun set so quickly in a night of unending gloom!"

"Adine! Do you feel thus?" cried the Earl in astonishment, and with wounded feeling.

"We both feel thus, Eustace," she replied, bitterly. "Let us for once acknowledge the truth to ourselves. We may blind the world into believing us a model couple, loving and happy, but we surely need not hesitate to let fall the gay mask when we are alone. Since we cannot undo our bonds, let us at least be conscious of them!"

"Adine you distress me!"

"It is easier to bear the yoke of silence?"

It trembled upon the Earl's tongue to tell her in reply to that demand how he had grown to love her; how his heart thrilled at every tone of her voice; how he admired her above all other women; how he did homage to her beauty and goodness; how he worshipped her with all his heart and soul, desiring nothing in all this world so much as to win her love in return.

In short, the story of his strong, passionate, enduring love for her struggled for utterance,

and he longed to tell her that she was the "star of his destiny"—the star whose light for him could never wane.

But the words were not uttered.

The strange bitterness of the young Countess warned him that they would not be well received, and he schooled himself to patience.

"If it were not that the affair would cause a lasting scandal," said Lady Roslyn, "I should propose that we separate—that you literally go your way and I go mine. You could then institute proceedings for a divorce on the ground that I deserted you—"

"Never, never!" interrupted the Earl, vehemently, his face becoming sterner than the young wife had ever seen it. "No, Adine, even if you hate me, that cannot be. I would never consent to such a step. While I live, if I can prevent it, scandal shall never busy herself with the name of Roslyn! If at any period there ever occurred family dissensions among any of my name, the world was never informed of them and made ampie, and I do not intend to make known my domestic unhappiness!"

"You need not fear that I shall, then," said the Countess, with quiet resolution. "My pride is not less than your own, Eustace. Had it been less, or my regard for you been weak, I should have quitted you and Roslyn Manor upon our bridal night, and never looked upon your face again!"

"And that on account of that fatal compact which I proposed and to which you acceded?"

Lady Roslyn had spoken unguardedly, her thoughts being busy with the enemy whom she had found that night making himself at home in her boudoir, and she now collected her thoughts, answering,—

"No, Eustace, the compact was well enough. I was glad and relieved to hear you propose it, for I should never, perhaps, have summoned enough courage to say it myself. But I had begun to realise that we should not get on well together; that, in fact, we are unsuited to each other!"

The Earl maintained a grave silence of some moments' duration, and his young wife reflected upon what he had said of his pride in his family, and shuddered to think what would be the consequences, if by any untoward event her secret should be blazoned forth to the world.

She looked up at his pale, stern face timidly, with a vain wish that she might reveal to him the dread mystery preying upon her, and then she checked the wish with a sudden fear that her mind might be wandering.

To unveil her heart to him, she thought, would be like putting her head within the lion's jaws.

Lord Roslyn was the first to speak.

"Our conversation has been rather singular for a bride and bridegroom yet in their honeymoon, has it not, Adine?" he said, in a hoarse voice, and with a ghastly smile.

"Yes, but frankness is best!" she answered.

"This state of affairs may not continue always, Adine. Some kind fate may give you relief from all that you now struggle against. We have been very frank with each other so far, and now I want to ask of you a continuation of your candidness. Tell me, Adine, that you will not be offended at a question I am about to ask you!"

"I promise!"

He fixed his eyes upon her with an intense and searching gaze, and his voice faltered as he said,—

"As your husband I have a right to ask it, but I do not forget that when I asked it once before you gave me no satisfaction. Do you love Harold Bevan?"

The question, and the abruptness with which it was put, brought a faint, fluctuating colour to the cheeks of the young wife, but she raised her eyes to the gaze of the Earl, replying, with plainly manifest truthfulness, and a quiet dignity,—

"You should have known me better than to have asked such a question, Eustace. I do

not love Harold Bevan. If I had loved him I should not have married you!"

The Earl's face shone with a sudden glow, and a look of thankfulness was apparent in his eyes, but the glow and look faded soon, and he asked,—

"Adine, do you love anyone?"

"No one in the world, but my brother, Hubert Sayton!" she answered, half-haughtily.

"Thank Heaven, my wife!" he murmured, under his breath.

"I might ask why you put such singular questions, Eustace. I might refuse to answer them. In some moods I suppose I should refuse. But I am sorry for you to-night, and sorry for myself!"

She spoke wearily, and put her hand to her face to shade its change of expression from the observant eyes of her husband.

It was her left arm, and, as she moved it, the lace under the sleeve of her evening dress fell back, displaying its softly rounded proportions, and the bracelet encircling it.

The Earl started, and bent forward with an eager look.

"Is that the star bracelet, Adine?" he asked.

Lady Roslyn started, having forgotten that she had regained possession of the valued ornament, and she extended her arm to him that he might examine it.

"It is indeed my mother's bracelet. Why, where did you find it, Adine? You did not wear it at dinner."

"I know I did not. I put it on since I came up this evening."

"But how did you recover it?"

"It was not lost at all, Eustace," she said, striving to speak lightly. "We have been too much troubled about it. Its disappearance was the result of a little carelessness on my part, and now that I have found it I shall be more careful of it!"

Roslyn was scarcely satisfied at his bride's non-communicativeness with regard to its recovery, and exclaimed,—

"Then that fellow who came out of your window had stolen nothing! What could he have wanted here? Perhaps he took the bracelet and feared to keep it lest he should be discovered. Where did you say you found it?"

"I did not say, I believe. But I found it in this room. Would you like to look at it?"

To put an end to further inquiries she unclasped the ornament and laid it in his hand.

He looked at it, turning it over and over, regarding the peculiar form of the star and the peculiar brilliants composing it, and then looked at the narrow gold band lining the inner part of the ornament.

(To be continued.)

## FACETIE.

AN UNTHINKING partisan, like a sightless monkey, blindly follows an organ.

PROFESSOR OF MINERALOGY (at the examination): "Where the most diamonds found?" Candidate: "At the pawnbroker's."

BOB: "I am afraid Tom is getting into a bad habit." DICK: "What bad habits?" BOB: "When he gets into clothes that are not paid for."

TOMMY: "What is a genius, Pa?" PAPA: "A genius, my son, is a man who has so little money that he can never afford to get his hair cut."

THE INFANT TERRIBLE.—At Table: Jones, a guest, has the misfortune to break a wine-glass. Precocious Kid: "And oh, mamma, it's one of the borrowed ones."

"Will you take it as presumption, madam, if I offer you these few roses?" said the bank-teller to Miss Gold dust. "I don't know you, sir!" "I am aware of that. But you are the only woman in the history of this bank who ever endorsed a check on the right end!"

"In times of peace," said the major, "I frequently go to military balls." "And in times of war?" "The military balls comes to me. That's how I lost my leg."

ED: "What do you understand by a paradox?" NED: "Well, for instance, the more ice cream you give your girl the warmer grows her affection for you. Understand?"

"What is society?" It is a place where people who were poor twenty-five years ago tell of the plebeian origin of their neighbours, and conceal their own humble beginnings.

"Yes, I was awfully fond of that girl, and I believed her to be perfect, but I saw something about her last night that made me ill." "What was that?" "Another fellow's arm."

"Have you taken a bath?" asked the officer at Deer Island of the Anarchist who had just come down on the morning boat. "Do I look like a man who takes baths?" was the proud reply.

FIRST TRAMP: "We have got to be careful, cully." SECOND TRAMP: "What's de matter?"

FIRST TRAMP: "I read in a paper dat skin diseases is spread by de circulation of bank notes."

CONFESSION OF FAITH.—"When we were married you confessed entire faith in me," he said. "Yes," she replied; "but lately I have been convinced that the confession of faith needed revising."

"Mamma," said Flossie, "I'm sorry about papa." "Why, dear?" "He is getting ready to be profane. He says he thinks the river near our house ought to be—only I shan't say the rest of it."

TEACHER (in spelling-class): "Johnny, spell fail." Johnny: "I can't." Teacher: "You can't spell that simple word? Why not?" Johnny: "Cause you told me there's no such word as fail."

GRANDMA: "Keep quiet, Tommy; children should be silent when older people are talking." Tommy: "Then I'll not get a chance to talk for a good while yet, for old people never are silent."

BOBBY ENOB: "Mabel, darling, I am afraid our engagement will have to be broken; now, do not take it to heart." Mabel Darling: "Oh! I shan't, Bobby, dear; I'll take it to court for twenty thousand."

PATER: "My boy, when I was your age I was at my desk at seven o'clock in the morning." The Son: "That may be, but I know the business is perfectly safe in your hands, even while I'm away."

TEACHER (at school treat): "Will you have a little bread and butter?" Tommy: "No." Teacher (anxious to inculcate politeness): "No—what?" Tommy: "While there's some more cake left!"

FIRST TRAMP (pointing to a scarecrow in a cornfield): "Look! Lookee there!" SECOND TRAMP: "My! My! We must git out o' this, double quick. They've caught one of us fellers and nailed him to a pole."

"Pity a poor blind man with a large family!" cried a wayside beggar. "And how many children have you, unfortunate man?" asked a lady in great concern. "How can I tell, madam? I can't see 'em."

LADY (to her three-year-old, to whom the greengrocer has just presented an apple): "And what do you say to Mr. Grubb for the nice apple?" Three-year-old (holding out apple to Mr. Grubb: "Peel it."

"Oh, yes," said the wheezy old bachelor, "I'm very fond of little boys; and as he tripped on a piece of string stretched across the walk, he added: "I feel as though I could eat a couple of 'em this minute, roasted!"

"P'what's yer name, young feller?" "Dinnis." "Ph'well, Dinnis, mo boy, it's yerself has jist begun strait-swapsin', an' it's meself has been at it since Tammany invintid swapsin', an' it's yerself as will be discharged if you wurruk as hard as ye have this mornin'. Niver swape up terday p'what ye kin lave for to-morrow. Take it aisy, Dinnis,—take it aisy."

"It is very kind of you to stay at home with your poor sick mamma," she said. "You want to help me to bear the pain, don't you, darling?" "Oh, no," replied Tommy: "I want to see you double up and boller, mamma."

SCHOOL BOARD OFFICER: "Haven't you a son named John William, Mrs. Timmins?" Mrs. Timmins: "Yes." S.B.O.: "Then, why doesn't he go to school?" Mrs. T.: "Cause he's been in Ameriky this sixteen years!"

SHE: "Did papa ask you about your income?" HE: "Yes." SHE: "And you told him that little fib about the large salary?" HE: "Yes." SHE: "I am so glad." HE: "Well, I'm sorry. He borrowed five pounds."

A DIFFERENCE.—Briggs: "There is one thing I admire about your wife, if you will permit me to say so. She is always so outspoken." N. Pack: "She may be outspoken, but I must say I never knew her to be out-talked."

"We have 208 bones in our body," said a teacher of physiology in a Board school. "Up went a hand, and the owner, a little girl, said she had 209. "How is that?" asked the teacher. "Why, I swallowed a fishbone at dinner."

"What did hubby do while his wifey was away?" asked the dear creature on her return. "I played solitaire nearly every evening," he replied sheepishly. "Who with?" was the next query, in a tone of deep suspicion.

AUNT MARY: "Bertha, how would you like to have another little sister?" Bertha: "I'd like it well enough, only I'd want her to be older'n I am." Aunt Mary: "Why?" Bertha: "Because then she'd have to give up some nice things to me."

"SHALL we marry, darling, or shall we knot?" was the short and witty line an ardent lover dispatched to the idol of his heart. But where the strangeness of the matter comes in, the girl replied: "I shall not. You may do as you please."

FAT OLD COOK (with unconscious blushes, to the lady who wants to engage her): "As to there bein' no followers allowed, mum, you might recollect as you've been single yourself, and a girl as is rather showy in figure can't well help 'em coming about."

FATHER: "When I was a boy I was a very different fellow from what you are. I went to bed at eleven o'clock and was up bright and early at four." Son: "It's the other way with me. I go to bed bright and early at four and crawl out of bed at eleven—or later."

MR. DE FIRM: "I tremble to think of our daughter marrying that young man. Why, he orders his mother and sister about as if they were slaves." MR. DE FIRM: "Don't worry, my dear. He won't order our daughter about more than once. She takes after you."

SIR, I understand that you said I was a thief—a thief and a robber! I want an explanation!" said a shoemaker to Blobs. "Sir," he returned suavely, "you are entirely mistaken. What I said was, that you sold shoes so cheap that you are almost a freebooter."

MISS ANTIQUE (taking politely proffered seat in crowded street car): "Thank you, my little man. You have been taught to be polite I am glad to see. Did your mother tell you to always give up your seat to ladies?" Polite Boy: "No'm, not all ladies, only old ladies."

"JAMESON, who has just been married, is rather extravagant, I think. He has a cook and a servant girl. His wife ought to do the housework." "Oh, she doesn't know how. Before he married her she was the editress of a ladies' cookery book and household journal."

CONVERSATION turned upon the difference in age that ought to exist between husband and wife. "My wife was nine years younger than I," said Calino, "when I married her." "How is it now?" queried a friend. "I don't know," replied Calino, shaking his head doubtfully, "my wife has been ageing very rapidly of late."



## SOCIETY.

Moscow has a society for the endowment of poor brides.

A new sunshade, called the "Pedestrienne," has a parasol pocket in the handle just right for holding the flowers, weeds, odds-and-ends one may pick up on a rural expedition.

The Duchess of Fife is now practically quite well again, and the Duke has consented to open a forthcoming exhibition of Metallurgy at the Crystal Palace.

The wedding-gift of the city of Vienna to the Archduchess Valérie consists of a magnificent casket containing fourteen water-colour paintings of Viennese scenery by the best-known Austrian artists.

The Emperor William has been studying Russian assiduously during the last year, in order that he may be able to converse in that language during his visit to Pétshof next month, instead of hearing nothing but French, as in 1888, for neither the Czar nor the Czarina can speak German well.

It is to be hoped that the sacredness of our "God's acre" will never be marred by the French notion of leaving cards upon the dead in a metal receptacle. The idea is gruesome and repugnant to a degree. Surely the forms and ceremonies of Vanity Fair should stop short this side of the Styx!

The visit of the Persian Shah's favorite wife to Vienna has done her much good. The two surgeons who treated her have saved her sight, and, incidentally, the heads of the astrologers who advised the trip. They are said to get £2,000 as their joint fee.

The wedding favours distributed at Miss Tennant's wedding had a small silver medal of the continent of Africa attached to them. The medal was given with the favours by the wish of the bride, being an exact copy of a silver medal Mr. Stanley gave Miss Tennant before he started on his last journey to Africa.

HER MAJESTY is much interested in various orphan schools, and, in order to keep them well supplied with work, gives away quantities of linen, in order that she may be enabled to command fresh supplies from the schools.

MISS FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE has lately celebrated her seventieth birthday. It is thirty-six years since she organised and directed the military hospitals at Scutari, in the awful campaign of the Crimea.

THE Duke of Sutherland's only daughter, Lady Alexandra Leveson-Gower, is going to join the ranks of skilled nurses, she having become a student in that line at a London hospital.

It has been stated that square shoulders are going out, and sloping ones coming in, as a reaction has started in favour of Book of Beauty prettiness, of the languishing and die-away orders. The waistcoated, skirted, sailor-hatted, athletic girl has had a long day of it, and a more ethereal rival is to take the field.

EVERYBODY is now calling for auburn hair. It is the colour above all others in favour in the world of fashion. The shade is very becoming, especially to women with pretty shades of complexion, olive or fair, as the case may be. The auburn has the warm, bright glow of the sun, without the unbecoming tendency of golden hair to exaggerate features and make them look so much larger. Auburn hair is now in greater demand than blonde hair ever was, and is gaining in favour daily. Of course, Patti is the originator of the present style.

THE Empress of Germany, like other European ladies of position, dresses with extreme plainness for church. She wears, usually, a wool walking dress, wool jacket or ulster, simple round hat and dark gloves, and is so unobtrusive a person that but for her place in the royal pew of the great Domkirche she might be supposed to be some young country matron on a first visit to the city, rather than the wife of the Emperor.

## STATISTICS.

THERE have been five Archbishops of Canterbury during the present reign.

Two out of the four hundred icebergs off Newfoundland are each a mile square.

INDIA ranks fourth among the countries of the world in the extent of its coal deposits. She has 30,000 square miles of coalfields; the United States, 500,000; China, 400,000; and Australia, 200,000; but only 500,000 tons are annually mined in India.

THE water area of the London docks is 650 acres; the area of the Liverpool docks is 349 acres, to which must be added 159 acres in Birkenhead; then there are 23 graving docks in Liverpool and Birkenhead for repair of vessels; these have an aggregate floor space of 14,919 feet.

THE smallest measure of weight in use, the grain, has its name from being originally a grain of wheat. A statute passed in England in 1266 ordained that 32 grains of wheat, taken from the middle of the ear and well dried, should make a pennyweight, 20 of which should make an ounce, while 12 ounces were to make a pound.

## GEMS.

LOVE is as old as the first moment of eternity, and as new as the last moment of time.

DUTY cannot be neglected without harm to those who practise as well as those who suffer from neglect.

CAUTION in crediting, reserve in speaking, and in revealing one's self to very few, are the best securities both of peace and a good understanding with the world, and of the inward peace of our own minds.

At least, life is not very long. A few more smiles, a few more tears, some pleasures, much pain, sunshine and songs, clouds and darkness, hasty greetings, abrupt farewells—then our little play will close, and injurer and injured will pass away. Is it worth while to hate each other?

OBSTINACY is a bad thing to live with and have to submit to, but infirmity of purpose is a worse. In the former you have at least a sense of solidity and persistence; with the latter you are like a leaf, not borne on the current, but tossed about on the foam, and where you will be landed is a secret to which you have not the remotest idea.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

A FEW pieces of horseradish root put among pickles will keep the scum from rising on top, and improve their flavour.

BLACK ink spots may be taken from white materials by dipping the soiled parts in melted tallow, letting it lie for awhile, and then washing the ordinary way.

TO CLEAN ERIN RUGS.—Put them down on the floor and wash with a flannel and Brooks's soap and tepid water. Take clean water and wash again. Of course, rub with a dry cloth to take as much water out as possible, and shake till pretty dry.

A CUP OF COFFEE.—Coffee is far more delicious when made with eggs than it is without. One egg to a spoonful of ground coffee is about the right proportion for a rich extract, but less than this can be easily used, by adding a tea-cupful of cold water to a well-beaten egg, and using enough of this mixture to thoroughly wet the ground coffee. Beat an egg thoroughly, add two tablespoonfuls of cold milk; pour this mixture into a pint of boiling milk, let scald, but not boil. Try this when you have no cream for breakfast coffee.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

RECENT experiments show that red uniforms are most easily discernible with electric search-lights, and that blue uniforms are the least conspicuous.

THE new observatory near Tananarivo, Madagascar, will be one of the highest in the world, as the site chosen is about forty-four hundred feet above sea level.

GARIBALDI'S tomb, in Caprera, is to be made a national monument, and the island is to be devoted to the purposes of a home for old sailors. A lighthouse also will be erected.

HEAVY work or driving soon after eating and drinking is as bad for a horse as a man. Rest should follow a full meal, or very moderate work, when work cannot be postponed long enough.

PARIS will give up its old cab system of "courses" and "hours" for cabs next April, and will adopt the mileage system. The fare is to be fifteen cents for the first mile, and five cents per mile for any further distance.

IT is said to be possible to restore one who is helplessly intoxicated to the almost complete use of his faculties in a very short time by administering to him a half-teaspoonful of ammonium chloride in a tumbler of water.

If the records are to be believed, long life is one of the blessings of Russia. In one year, the deaths were reported of 858 persons between 100 and 105 years old; 130 between 115 and 120 years old; and three between 150 and 156.

A SNOGGER in Paris has struck out a novel way of making a living. Being gifted by Providence with a face of preternatural ugliness, he goes about from café to café making grimaces for the amusement of the customers, and seems to make a pretty good thing of it. We have a class of people in England too whose "face is their fortune," but we call them "professional beauties."

THE latest method the itinerant photographer has discovered for turning an honest penny is somewhat ingenious. He haunts cemeteries, and with his camera photographs all the new grave-stones that are erected. Then having obtained the address of the relatives of the deceased person, he posts a copy of the photograph, with the intimation that he is willing to supply "a dozen souvenirs of the late departed for 5s. 6d." The number of orders the photographer receives is stated to be surprising.

RUSSIAN tea is simply served without cream, and instead, a slice of lemon. For the preparation of this, an old Russian recipe may be acceptable: To one-half pound of tea add one large lump of sugar; spread the tea upon the board, crush the leaves and sugar with a rolling-pin as finely as possible; mix thoroughly. In making, add water very gradually. We will say, for the benefit of those who dislike sugar, that it cannot be detected. In what lies the virtue we cannot say, but certain it is that tea thus made is delicious.

It is not generally known that there positively exists a marked boundary line between Canada and the United States. Most people suppose the line to be "imaginary." But the fact is the boundary is distinctly marked from Lake Michigan to the Pacific by cairns, pillars of iron, earth mounds and timber clearings. There are nearly four hundred of these marks between the Lake of the Woods and the foot of the Rocky Mountains. The British have placed one post every two miles and the United States have alternated between each of the British posts. The posts are made of cast-iron, and on their faces are the words: "Convention of London, October 20, 1818." Where the line crosses through lakes, small mountains of stones have been built, rising eight or ten feet above the level of high-water mark. In the forests, the line is defined by felling trees, making a clearing for a space of a rod wide.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**MARK C.**—Cousins of any degree may lawfully marry.  
**AN OLD READER.**—The son has no right to detain the furniture.

**TOST.**—The census is taken every ten years in this country—last on 3rd of April, 1881.

**NO WATER.**—Unless otherwise expressly specified, a tenant must always pay water rate.

**TOM.**—Birmingham is a city by virtue of a Royal Charter conferring that title upon it.

**DELTA.**—No; Colonel Baker Pasha was never reinstated. He died in his Turkish command.

**SPIKARRE.**—The Government of the East India Company ceased September 1, 1858. The value of a rupee is 1s. 7d.

**ONLY A BOY.**—Unless there is a special agreement to the contrary, weekly wages are not due while upon a holiday.

**ONE WHO HAS SEEN IT.**—1. St. Peter's at Rome could hold as many as 60,000 persons. 2. The population of Rome is 272,012.

**TRADERSMAN.**—1. There is, in many cases, an appeal from the decision of a county court judge. 2. No; quite the other way.

**MURIEL.**—If a wife leaves her husband voluntarily, and he is willing for her to return, he is not liable to her for her maintenance.

**H. F.**—An apprentice cannot, without his own consent and that of his legal guardians, be transferred to the purchaser of a business.

**MAS SMITH.**—The edition of Burns' work you possess is neither scarce nor valuable. Probably you would have difficulty in getting 1s. 6s. for it.

**RUPERT.**—It would be a gross breach of confidence to comply with your request. We wonder that your own sense of honour did not tell you so.

**TAPLEY.**—A farmer may shoot all ground game on land in his occupation without taking out a game certificate. He must have a gun licence.

**WIDOW.**—You are not liable for a pane of glass broken by your son, but your son may be prosecuted and sent to prison in default of paying the damage.

**G. A.**—A man who should stand on his own ground and shoot game on his neighbour's land while he sent his dog to recover would be guilty of poaching.

**J. E.**—You may call it a good sixty miles from Londonderry to Donegal by railway, and the fare is at least 6s. Railway travelling is dear in Ireland.

**FOZZLED.**—The Jews date from the Creation, hence the year 5598 on the gravestone. They know nothing of our Christian era, because they say Christ has not yet come.

**S. S. S.**—We cannot advise you to have anything more to do with these drawings. They are, it seems to us, rapidly approaching the point at which the authorities must interfere.

**ADA.**—No; it is a mere catchpenny advertisement. We strongly advise you to go to the doctor of the highest reputation in your own district. He has many such cases, and will not refuse you.

**FREELAND.**—If what you want is positive security for your money, take it to a Post Office Bank; it is then lent to Government, and cannot be lost. Have nothing to do with touting London banks.

**A POOR WOMAN.**—It cannot be done; that is the fact. The fault you committed, innocently enough we know, makes it impossible, and any money you might spend in attempting it would just be wasted.

**F. K.**—It is not illegal to make casual bets in a thoroughfare, but if you take your stand at some special place and make a business of betting in the thoroughfare, you will then fall into the hands of the police.

**IN FORT.**—We cannot undertake to answer a question of that kind. You must either refer to the harbour authorities or owners, and neither would tell you without knowing what the information was wanted for.

**ALINE.**—The letters I.H.S., seen as you say in chapels, stand for *Iesus Hominum Salvator*; that is, Jesus the Saviour of men. There is no J in Latin, hence the I. A free translation, which please a good many, is, "I have suffered."

**SOLDIER BOY.**—The age for enlistment is eighteen to twenty-five years, but anyone older or younger who looks the correct age and says he is, will be retained and made to serve his time, even though his correct age should be disclosed.

**VERA.**—There are books published on the subject of palmistry. The explanation would take up too much space for our correspondence columns. There is no meaning attached to the colour of hair and eyes. Your note is well written and expressed.

**JACK.**—You will never run any risk by "being too good a boy" to your parents. You can do your best in that respect, and be certain that no harm will ever come of it. That cousin of yours is not a good adviser for you. Keep your weather eye on him.

**HARDICANUTE.**—A vicar is the priest of a parish the prebendal tithes of which are appropriated; a rector is the clergyman of a parish where the tithes are not appropriated. As to why some clergymen adopt peculiarities of costume we must refer you to the wearers.

**JANE.**—It is not customary to put the abbreviation "R. S. V. P." on an invitation to a wedding. In some cases the abbreviation has been contained in invitations to a wedding breakfast, when it was desired to learn beforehand how many and what guests would be present.

**ROBERT.**—If you have a little money to put into the purchase, go to a building society, tell them what you are able to do, and ask them to lend you as much more as is necessary to complete the purchase. The titles will, of course, be assigned to the society in security of their loan.

**VICTIM.**—We do not know of any legal power which entitles the Post Office to refuse to deliver at a private house letters addressed to A. B. "and Co." Your best course would be, in the first instance, to write to the Postmaster-General, and inquire as to the authority for such refusal.

**PAUL.**—If you do not write to your friend, drawing attention to the fact that the instrument is broken the moment it comes into your hands again, it is doubtful whether you can afterwards sue for damages at all. By delay you create the presumption that the thing was broken in your own hands.

**GOING OUT.**—The storage fare to New York is about £4 by all boats. It is well, however, before paying even that moderate sum to know what you are going to do in America when you arrive there. If you are to cast about for something to do you may as well do it at home, not among strangers.

**MADRELINE DORA GREY.**—1. You had better ask the question of some local paper. The town in question has never been very celebrated, and its great men have been mostly local celebrities. One of the newspapers of the district will supply the information. 2. You write a pretty hand, rather small, perhaps, but neat.

## A BACHELOR'S LOVE SONG.

My bachelor's den is a queer old pen,  
In the midst of a city's din,  
O'erlooking the tide that goes ebbing out  
And the flow that comes rushing in.

'Tis cheerful and bright, 'tis a home to me—  
A quiet and peaceful place—  
Though it ne'er knew the warmth of a woman's heart  
Nor the light of a woman's face.

I sit in the dusk as the sun goes down,  
And smoke in a dreamful way,  
And gaze at the paintings that hang on the wall—  
The faces and friends far away.

One is the face of a fair young girl,  
As bright as the morning skies,  
Who smiles at me ever with angel's love  
From the depths of her dark blue eyes.

She was my first, my only love;  
Forget her I never can,  
Her love has followed me all through life,  
And made me a better man.

Hers the lips I first tenderly kissed,  
With love as deep as the sea;  
And the last lips I kissed, as I bade home farewell,  
Were the lips that are smiling at me.

Ah, mother, my love for you never grew dim  
Through the long years of toil and unrest,  
And I love you to-day as I did long ago,  
When you lulled me to sleep at your breast.

J. H. R.

**NEMO.**—In appearance, none, except that the opera-glass is usually more ornamental and toy-like. The real difference is in the shape and character of the glasses inside, the one enabling the user to see objects at a short distance off sharply defined, the other having a very long focus, that is to say, showing distant objects sharply.

**BOBBY.**—When the rout of the French at Waterloo became complete, it is asserted that "Napoleon, with one regiment of the Guard thrown into square, endeavoured to form a rallying point for the fugitives. Failing in this, he expressed his determination to die within the square, but was hurried away by Soult, the Guard covering his escape."

**T. POWERS.**—It is not true that a labouring man can earn more than 5s. per day in Australia, or the average of the year's earnings, and in order to get that sum a labourer in this country must amass £20 at least to take him out to Australia. There are no assisted passages. You will probably think if you had £20 you would know better what to do with it.

**WORRIED AGNES.**—An excellent fly paper may be made by soaking a newspaper or any other sort of paper in a solution of alum, letting that dry, then make up a mixture by melting together four ounces of resin with one ounce of linseed oil and one ounce of honey. Smear the mixture over the prepared paper, and you will have a capital "catch 'em all alive."

**ESSON.**—In England "dead" letters are sent to the district Returned Letter branches, of which there are nine, including the Returned Letter Office in London. This system applies in Canada, but we believe that all letters "made dead" in the United States are sent direct to New York, and thence to the Returned Letter Office, London, where they would be opened and returned to senders, if containing name and address. You had better send a registered letter, and then apply to the Post Office if you get no reply.

**HARRY.**—You may insist upon the man giving you a satisfactory watch or send him for repayment of your money if he refuses to do so, but all that means money and vexation of spirit. As a matter of fact, you had better sell the watch for as much as it will fetch, and go to a respectable and reliable dealer for another one. You will find that the cheapest in the end.

**ZOE.**—The Angelus represents a French peasant and his wife, who, while at work in the fields, hear the ringing of the angelus bell, and who, thereupon, according to the custom in their religion, reverently bow their heads and recite a prayer to the Virgin Mary. So perfect is the picture's realism that Millet, the artist who painted it, has aptly been said to have put sound on canvas.

**POLLY BIRD.**—You are far too young to think of emigrating in the way you propose, and the expense of doing so would be very heavy. We never heard of any special demand for female servants in the place you mention, and there are no assisted passages now. Unless you have an engagement to go to you had much better stay at home. The third-class fare to the Cape of Good Hope is £15.

**VERITAL.**—You must be rather inexperienced as to the usages of society, and deficient in knowledge of human nature, if you suppose that any lady would tolerate your contradictions of her statements. Under the circumstances which you describe, we think the lady had good reason to cut your acquaintance, and that no intelligent and sensible man would have cause to be "astonished" at such a course on her part.

**PURITY ADA.**—One's hands need not be helpless. They can be white, though, and there is a very good way to make them so. Wash them every night in very hot water, using a good soap, and giving them a thorough bath; then, having dried them gently on a soft towel, rub olive oil lightly over them, and put on a pair of gloves. Continue this for two weeks, after which the hot bath alone ought to keep them white.

**IN TROUBLE.**—Too late. The objection should have been urged when you began to pay, except, indeed, the worthlessness of the articles has come to light since then. In that case you may not only refuse to pay more, but threaten to sue for repayment of a good deal of what you have already given, on the ground that it was in excess of the value of the things. To prove your case you must call practical men to speak to the bad character of the stuff supplied to you.

**ZEO.**—You cannot get engagements either as cowboys or scouts, and a good thing, too, you will say when you have a little more experience of the world. You will convince yourselves after a while that there is nothing heroic in living like a sow to look after a cow. Cattle ranching has produced only one Buffalo Bill as yet. If there were another he would run some chance of being looked up as a nuisance. A very little of the shout and swagger business serves for a feast nowadays.

**A MARTYR.**—Prevention is better than cure. Let us give you the following simple tip, which we have found most efficacious:—Put a handful of quassa chips in a muslin bag and place it in the water ewer, and use with carbolio soap for washing. The chips make the water very bitter, and, combined with the carbolio, gives to the skin such a flavour that no insect will venture near it. The bag of chips will last two or three days, when it should be renewed. It is perfectly harmless to the skin.

**IN DOUBT.**—Having frankly apologized, you have done all that is required of you to propitiate the offended individual, and he must now prove his title to be considered a superior person by showing that he bears no malice. You will therefore meet him as if nothing had happened; make not the most distant allusion to the disagreeable matter, and should he prove gratified or sulky, maintain your good humour throughout, and part from him with every appearance of friendship. Should he persist in remaining sulky he is a bore, and you had better cut his acquaintance for the future.

**SHORT BEV.**—No one who has not seen you can say whether your round shoulders are curable, but presuming that they are, the training you refer to will assist the cure. You must also have a daily sponge or shower bath, with vigorous rough towelling afterwards, then ten minutes with the dumb-bells, swinging them backwards; also, if possible, draw yourself up to a bar on the top of your bath or bedroom door, if there is a window above it with a sill which you can grasp. Then at intervals during the day place your heels together, your hands and arms rigidly by your side, with head well set back, then raise yourself so on your toes twelve or twenty times deliberately.

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†† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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